

HENRY OF NAVARRE



British Museum

HENRY OF NAVARRE

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(*LE VERT-GALANT*)

By
MARCELLE VIOUX

TRANSLATED BY J. LEWIS MAY



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PART I

THE COURT OF CHARLES IX

THE ample folds of her widow's gown rustling about her as she moved, Catherine de' Medici slowly and majestically ascended the steps of the astrologer's tower which, at her command, had lately been raised on the site of the former Hôtel de Bohème.

High up, with the starry hosts of the midsummer sky glittering around him, Ruggieri, her favourite astrologer, whom years ago she had brought with her from Italy, was reclining on the flat roof, contemplating the maze of stars through an iron framework which crowned the tower and divided the heavens into twelve concentric circles.

"Well?" said the Queen, in an anxious tone.

The astrologer stole a furtive glance at his questioner. The sight of that heavy, pale, impassive countenance always filled him with a vague foreboding.

"My observations confirm what we read yesterday in the entrails of the slaughtered beasts," he replied. "All Your Majesty's children will wear the crown."

Her lips quivered. *All of them!*—all that sickly brood, in whose veins ran the tainted blood of the Valois and the Medicis. . . .

Of the seven children she had borne alive to King Henry II of France, five remained to her. Francis II, her first-born, who had succeeded when but a lad of sixteen to his father's throne, was dead already, having reigned but one brief year. The second son, the half-crazy Charles IX, now wielded the sceptre. The third, the effeminate Henry of Anjou, on whom she doted, was betrothed to Elizabeth, the elderly Queen of England, who was much more like a man than a woman. Of a truth, it would be a well-assorted union! And what throne awaited the detested, misshapen Alençon?

Of her three daughters, the eldest, the Queen of Spain, had just been poisoned by her husband, Philip II, a sinister creature, half-

king, half-monk. The second, a victim of tubercular disease of the hip, had been tossed by way of a wedding portion to the Guises, as you might fling a bone to a hungry dog. What crown would *she* ever wear? The third, who was also the prettiest, wildest, wittiest and most seductive child imaginable, Marguerite of Valois, had been affianced when no more than three years old to Henry of Bourbon, Prince of Navarre, who had come into the world a few months later than herself. Subsequently, Catherine had vainly offered her to every eligible monarch in Europe, bachelor or widower. But, constrained by reasons of policy, the Queen-Mother was now falling back on her husband's original plan. For, though her children might play the sovereign, it was Catherine who really ruled. And what was "ruling" in those days but keeping a sharp look-out for whatever titbit might fall from the jaws of the contending parties by whose internecine quarrels France was then unceasingly ravaged? Religion was the cloak beneath which the leaders dissembled their insatiable ambition. The Guises, who headed the Catholics, were supported by the gold of Spain. The Bourbons, who captained the Protestants, were backed by the might of England. Each side was bent on gaining the ascendancy.

Catherine had been thirteen years a widow. With this troop of sickly children—for whose heritage all the princes were ravening like wolves—trailing at her heels, she had been obliged to have recourse to every kind of ruse and subterfuge, playing off this prince against that, scheming, plotting, trimming with Machiavellian subtlety, steeling her heart, banishing every scruple. Nevertheless, though under the constant menace of being sent back to Italy, of being sewn up in a sack and flung into the Seine, of being murdered by dagger or firearm, and of having her children torn from her at any moment, she had proved herself more than a match for all her adversaries. Her passion for astrology, her profound conviction that all things in this world are governed by fate, rendered her largely indifferent to matters of religion. She flattered each of the rival parties in turn. Whenever there was a temporary suspension of hostilities, she invited the belligerent leaders to her Court, where,

to dull the edge of their mutual animosity, she let loose upon them the loveliest and most beguiling of her ladies with orders to soothe and soften their warlike passions in a sea of amorous delight.

Whenever one or other of the rival parties began to show signs of getting the better of its rival, Catherine hastened to the assistance of the weaker side, and then, inciting them to renew the conflict, left them to proceed with the work of mutual extermination. In due course she would go to survey the results of the battle, taking with her her most beautiful ladies and her most accomplished musicians, to divert with dance and song the minds of warriors gorged with blood.

Thus the ambitions of the day would be forgotten in the dalliance of the night. Next morning, these petticoated emissaries would come and present their reports to the Queen, who, clad in mourning for her late-lamented spouse, would listen, cold and unmoved, to the story of their conquests.

By this time, the Catholics had slain the two Bourbon leaders, Antony of Navarre and the Prince of Condé; while the Protestants, under the command of Admiral Coligny, had accounted for the Duke of Guise. But these leaders had left behind them wives and children vowed to vengeance. It was a vendetta which bade fair to last for ever, and by it Catherine's enemies were conveniently removed from her path.

In 1572, two youthful scions of the rival parties stood out face to face—the one, the handsome, fair-haired Henry of Guise; the other, Henry of Bourbon, first Prince of the Blood, a little, dark-haired, swarthy, blue-eyed fellow, sturdy and agile as the chamois of his native Pyrenees, and the very soul of courage. Guise was twenty-two; Navarre nineteen.

"But this little Navarre," said the Queen-Mother, "what of him? You know that Nostradamus, the learned soothsayer, foretold that all the heritage would fall to him—all, yes all," she repeated in tones of mingled rage and anguish.

"Have no fears on that score, Madame," answered Ruggieri. "None but the paltry crown of Navarre will ever gird his brows.

That he will don right soon, for if I read the signs aright, Death ere long will be busy in his house."

"God orders all things for the best," answered Catherine, raising her shapely hands to heaven.

The marriage of the Catholic princess, Marguerite, to the Protestant Henry of Navarre had but one aim, and that was to bring the wars of religion to a close. Catherine believed that a boy of nineteen, with the blood of a dissolute father in his veins, would soon be as enervated and debauched as his father had been before him. But his mother, the proud and austere Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre, the most rigid of Huguenots, had made up her mind that, as soon as the nuptials were over, son and daughter-in-law should depart with her. She would shut herself up with them, away from the world, in one of her strongholds in Béarn, or in the impregnable fortress of La Rochelle, whence she would continue to fan the flame of Protestant fanaticism and set the King of France at defiance. It needed all Catherine's self-control to enable her to brook the haughty demeanour of her unbending Huguenot rival. Having reviewed the whole situation in her mind overnight, she had sent for her perfumer, René the Florentine, for he was deeply versed in the secret of certain deadly Italian poisons wherewith he impregnated gloves that brought death to their wearer.

Noting the baleful gleam that flashed in the Queen's eye, Ruggieri felt his blood run cold. He, too, stood in mortal dread of this woman with the pale, immobile face. In the heavens, her star eclipsed all others in its path. Death was too busy by far in her vicinity. Hardly had she come into the world, when her parents disappeared. Her husband, her children successively succumbed. She alone survived. Death lurked in her very shadow. She seemed to grow fat on corpses. It was given out that to make herself invulnerable she wore the skin of a strangled babe about her ample waist. All her children save her favourite, the Duke of Anjou, went in mortal terror of her. Charles IX, so tall and strong, trembled at the sight of her, king though he was.

Suddenly the sound of a troop of galloping horse broke upon



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HENRY IV AT THE AGE OF 15

her ear, startling the echoes, rousing the sleeping citizens from their dreams. There was a noise of shouting and the furious lashing of a whip. The King, preceded by torch-bearers, was careering wildly down the squalid streets, chasing the wantons, belabouring the watch, shattering the windows of peaceful citizens and doing battle with the riff-raff of the Grève. The sound of his shrill, mad laughter echoed hideously through the night.

Sick at heart, Catherine turned to gaze into a magic mirror, if haply she might find some comfort there from the sight of what the future had in store. Alas, she only saw therein the reflection of her own puffed and pallid visage. She had played the dissembler too long. Thirty years of turning a false face to the world had left their mark behind them and moulded her countenance into that mysterious, impenetrable mask she saw before her.

Through the night rang out the sound of Charles's hunting horn. From the summit of her lofty tower the Queen-Mother peered down into the hollow darkness beneath, a darkness traversed ever and anon by fitful streaks of light.

"Think you that *he* will live?" she asked bitterly.

"No," answered Ruggieri, lowering his voice to a whisper.

Catherine turned away and began to descend the tower. She had almost reached the last of the dark steps when whispered words, and the sensation of someone passionately kissing the silver hem of her robe, brought her to a sudden standstill.

"Vostro servo, Maestà . . . vostro René. . ."

She breathed again. It was her perfumer, her confidant in crime, poor faithful wretch, ravaged and wasted by the fumes of the corrosive poisons he compounded.

"This night, Your Majesty, the she-wolf of Navarre came to buy of me a pair of jasmin-scented gloves."

"Ah!" Catherine drew closer and peered into the poisoner's very soul.

"Two pairs I sold her, well steeped in perfume. To-morrow she will be upon her death-bed."

"Hush! Take heed. Did no one see you coming hither?"

"Not a soul, Your Majesty."

She laid a warning finger on the slit of the black domino which she had put on over that other mask—her face.

In her canopied bed, Marguerite lay weeping. The lovely hand of her brother, the Duke of Anjou, a hand fragrant with costly unguents, wiped away her tears.

"A dirty little peasant," she sobbed. "A king of shreds and patches, with a kingdom no bigger than a farmyard! A king that reeks of garlic! An ill-kempt lout! 'Tis two weeks now since he came hither with his four hundred mud-begrimed gallowglasses, and the bath has seen him but once since then. And his yokel speech! And think of it, he's a Huguenot into the bargain!"

"Marguerite, my sweet one, be calm, I implore you. You know full well that we of royal blood may not marry for love like peasant folk. Policy, my poor little sister, must have its say. But after all, your lot is not so unhappy. I like this young King of Navarre with his dark hair, keen glance and free, open ways. To me he is quite charming. Besides, he must be very strong. . . ."

Like one in a dream the young Duke of Anjou began to toy with his sister's rich brown tresses.

"And yet, after all, 'tis a sorry spouse for you, my sunshine," he murmured. "He'll drag you off, you know, to his evil-smelling castles where you'll have to live the life of a country wench. Good-bye to fine dresses and sweet perfumes, good-bye to the dances and the violins. There will be nothing but psalm-singing the whole round of the clock. And they don't treat erring husbands and wives very lightly, I can tell you. They kill them. Ah, my poor, poor Margot, why did you do this thing?"

"Because they forced me to," she said, raising herself on her elbow from a cloud of lace-trimmed silken bedclothes. "Because they forced me!" she repeated angrily. "When the King, our brother, had the Duke of Guise's love-letters stolen from me, he took them straight to our mother. It was late at night. There was the King in his nightshirt, stamping, raging and shouting like a

maniac. Mother sent for me. God, how he hit me that night! The Queen looked on and never said a word. I thought she really wanted me to die. But at last she rose. "There, that will do," she said. But it took all her knowledge of drugs to bring me round again. As I was coming to, I heard the King giving orders for my lover to be killed. I contrived to warn him in time, and told him he had better marry his former mistress so as to avert suspicion. But I loved him! Oh, how I loved him! I shall never care for anyone but him. I don't want this clodhopping Béarnese."

The Duke of Anjou laid his pretty, painted face against his sister's tear-stained cheek, and, mouth to crimson mouth, they lingered in a long and tender kiss.

Their equivocal intimacy dated from their infant days. Growing up in the cruel atmosphere of civil conflict, harried and hunted, packed off to distant castles, bled, purged and whipped, crammed with Latin and Greek, with bloody revolutions in the palace, tortures and torments, hunting and cock-fighting—it was thus the royal children sought to console themselves for the horrors of the time.

With long, lithe fingers he caressed his sister's neck, which, even then, had grown perhaps a shade too full.

"Weep no more," he said. "I would have you look your loveliest to-morrow. I myself will dress you. I will braid your tresses for the bridal. See here, I've brought you a present, the pearls our mother gave me!"

Marguerite beamed with delight. She adored jewellery. "Marguerite," he went on, "I did not care for the Duke of Guise myself. I am glad you are marrying Navarre!" So saying, he tripped away, laughing his little rippling laugh, leaving a trail of perfume in his wake.

THE WEDDING

THE sound of trumpets and of hautboys began to fill the air. The great open space in front of the Cathedral was swarming with sightseers, an anxious, ominously silent multitude that looked with a coldly critical eye on the grey-clad cavaliers who composed the escort of the King of Navarre.

Then the bells rang out, and on a dais that had been erected for the occasion, in full view of the populace, Marguerite of Valois suddenly appeared, accompanied by her brother, the King of France.

"Long live Marguerite! Hurrah for our Margot! Long live the princess!" shouted the people, in transports of delight. And indeed she looked very lovely in her gown of purple velvet richly wrought with fleurs-de-lys, with its train of spotted ermine and her long royal cloak borne by four princesses. A diadem of great pearls, diamonds and rubies girt her lovely brow with its crown of vagrant tresses.

Charles IX, despite his two-and-twenty years, looked like a child that had outgrown its strength. His royal mantle had slipped awry and he was continually turning his green eyes in the direction of Cardinal de Bourbon, who was to perform the ceremony. For his conscience was pricking him not a little. The Pope was apparently in no hurry to grant the necessary dispensation permitting a daughter of the royal house of France to ally herself with a heretic. Wherefore the King, who looked at everything through the eyes of old Admiral Coligny—whom the people called the Huguenot pope—had flown into a violent rage.

"I'm not going to be made a fool of," he cried. "If the Pope of Rome plays this game too long, I'll take Margot along with me and do the marrying of her myself in a Protestant chapel."

Having relieved his feelings with that outburst, he displayed a

letter from his ambassador in Rome saying that the dispensation had been duly received. But he had written that letter himself.

Cardinal de Bourbon had not enquired too closely into the authenticity of this providential missive. He was a very obliging man, and he was also the uncle of the bridegroom.

Behind the bride and bridegroom came Catherine de' Medici, robed from head to foot in black. Her step was slow and stately, and at the sight of her the crowd broke forth into loud huzzahs. It was generally believed that she looked on the whole business as a scandal—this solemnising the marriage in a public place because the bridegroom refused to enter a church.

Against the gorgeous assemblage of kings and princes and princesses, Catherine's dark-stoled figure, unadorned by a single gem, looked sombre indeed. The Duke of Anjou, graceful and lissom as a girl, daintily proffered her his hand. The King of Navarre in his white-plumed hat and yellow satin doublet stood out a striking figure against the group of Huguenot lords who were still clad in the grey doublets and sable cloaks they had worn for the journey. And their looks were as sombre as their garments.

The Parisians, who loved their churches and had seen so many heretics perish in the flames, could not understand why these particular ones should have such honour paid them. They held their noses and exchanged significant winks.

"How now, gossip, methinks I nose a smell of burning!"

But there was no laughter, no merrymaking. It could never be that that old fossil of a Cardinal was going, for good and all, to tie up that sweet, adorable little twenty-year-old princess, the idol of all Paris, the dainty, witty, tender, clever, winsome Margot, to a squat, insignificant little bumpkin like that. What sacrilege! The merry music of the bells in the sweet June air brought no solace to their hearts.

The King of Navarre rapped out a "Yes" so loud and clear, you might have heard it at the Louvre. Now, in the tense silence, they were waiting the fateful word from Marguerite. She stood irresolute. Her courage failed her. Charles IX, seized with one of his

ungovernable fits of fury, struck her a blow with his clenched fist on the back of her beautiful neck, which she lowered with a moan. A murmur of resentment arose from the crowd. Surely they were not going to take that for a "Yes"! At breakneck speed, the Cardinal, as if both deaf and blind, gabbled through his Latin and hurriedly tied the knot which united Marguerite of Valois and Henry of Navarre. That done, the bridegroom took his young bride by the hand. She had turned as pale as death, oppressed by the weight of her robes, by the gathering storm, and by the thought of the calamity that had made havoc of her young life. Her husband conducted her to the choir of the Cathedral, where she heard Mass alone. He went off and joined his companions, who were lounging about outside bandying jests, very Gascon in flavour, with one another.

"Ah!" muttered the people, "you'll go to church one of these days whether you like it or not."

"Our esteemed cousins from Gascony have not spent much on their prince's wedding," the Parisians remarked. "They're proud enough in all conscience, but when it comes to putting on their best clothes, they're too niggardly for that. It's holding us and our royal family a little too cheap, I'm thinking."

"Folk say they're as poor as Job, and that, to pay for the journey and their victuals, they had to sell acres of land, and some of them the tumbledown castles that stood on it. . . ."

"Mark how they bluster and keep their hats on in the presence of the holy images. See how they turn everything to mockery. See how quick they are, for a mere nothing, to clap their hands on their sword-hilts, the wanton ruffians! And then, on the top of it all, they grumble. Would you believe it! Wasn't our welcome good enough, I should like to know?"

"Oh, well, as far as appearances go, they were well enough received . . ." said a female bystander.

"Well, then, what's the matter with them?"

"Why, friend, the Queen of Navarre, the bridegroom's mother, died, and very strangely, they say, some five weeks since."



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Ham. 1157. 11. 11. 11. 11.

CATHERINE DE' MEDICI

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"Oh, and so that, like everything else, has been laid as a crime at Madame Catherine's door, I suppose. Of course she's been accused of every sin, and called Madame Jezebel, and consigned to the lowest pit of hell."

"I accused no one. God forbid!"

"Look at my lord Duke of Guise, there, in the blue cloak, between the red one and the green. Do you see? There, just in front of the Bishop's palace. Isn't he handsome? How fair he is and how refined—ay, and how stately! He's a king, every inch of him! Is it true that Princess Marguerite is still in love with him?"

"So they say."

"And the King of Navarre—devil take him!—is he in love with her?"

"Who's to tell what's in the mind of that gentleman? From all accounts he's a deep customer."

An old man with white hair, Admiral Coligny, chewing his everlasting toothpick, was examining the Cathedral adorned with the flags that had been captured from his Huguenots at Jarnac and Montcontour.

"Surely it were better," he mused, "to employ all this youthful valour of our captains and soldiers outside the kingdom. Better to employ it against Spain, for example. Spain's wings sorely need a clipping."

Five score gentlemen bearing axes, the heralds-at-arms, the guards and officers of the King's Household, now came along to clear a passage for the royal procession on its way back to the palace. Trumpets, bugles, hautboys rang out merrily.

A sullen, disapproving silence greeted the King as he rode by, irritably biting his glove. Cries of "Down with the Huguenots!" resounded on all sides of the young bridegroom, who smiled just as serenely as if they had been shouts of "Long live the King of Navarre!"

There was a great ovation as the handsome Duke of Guise rode by. He bowed repeatedly and with rare grace to the cheering mul-

titude, which pressed eagerly forward to touch the garments and kiss the hand of the young Catholic leader, their idol.

But the wildest outburst of applause was reserved for Catherine, the indomitable mother of so many children, so many kings and queens, eternal regent, protectress of the young, widow inconsolable.

"*Bene! Bene!*" she said to herself. "There's nothing like having the people in the hollow of your hand."

Yes, there was no denying it, this marriage boded her no good. The Protestants were taking root in Paris. The virtuous Coligny was in the saddle, the King consulted him about everything, showed him marked respect and called him "Father."

Catherine, who could forgive everything except the usurpation of her power, was slowly and steadily preparing her revenge. This old sermoniser, this hoary cushion-thumper, who already fancied himself Regent of France, would soon find that he had reached the end of his tether.

The Huguenots brought up the rear of the dazzling procession. Hardly had they passed by, when housewives along the route ostentatiously emptied their chamber-pots out of the windows. . . .

Casks of wine had been broached at every street corner, fruits and dainties and sugar-plums unstintingly distributed. It was all in vain. The people refused to be fajoled.

"They never ought to have had the wedding here," said an old Gascon lord. "I told them so all along; but they wouldn't listen. 'If the wedding's held in Paris,' I said, 'then that wedding will be a red one, mark my words.'"

Some of the people, scared at the crowds on the bridges, hired ferries to take them across the river. Barges gay with bunting, loaded down to the water's edge with minstrels, were gliding down the stream.

"They say the citizens are arming," whispered a passer-by.

"Bah, believe it not, gossip. The citizens never take up arms save when the public funds are falling or when big stocks of cloth are left unsold in their warehouses."

"Well, and do not both these conditions hold good at this very moment?"

"By my faith, 'tis true that nothing has prospered since we've had these cursed civil wars!"

At length the procession reached the entrance to the palace. Charles IX, nerve-racked and out of breath, was cursing liberally, as was his wont. Finding his way blocked by a mule he drew his sword and dealt a savage blow at the poor beast's head.

"How comes Your Most Christian Majesty to have fallen out with my mule?" asked its owner sardonically, in an unmistakable Gascon accent.

The King heard him not. His bony hands trembled convulsively. Everybody went in fear of his terrible outbursts of fury, and obsequiously made way for him.

Soon after, the howling of beaten dogs was heard, followed by the sound of the royal hunting horn ringing wildly through the lighted palace.

After supper there was a ball in the Hall of the Caryatides, followed by a masquerade in which a buffoon's part was assigned to the King of Navarre.

The Gascon lords, who could dance no dance save the reel, and that only to a psalm tune, were the laughing-stock of all the Court. The Queen-Mother's delicious maids-of-honour, her "flying squad," whom she employed to wheedle secrets from the great ones, nor cared by what means they did so, made open mockery of these rustic boors, these unmannerly churls.

Apart, in the embrasure of a window, Henry of Navarre stood watching carefully the movements of the animated and shifting throng—perfumed lords, and ladies with enormous hoops. Assuming a jaunty air, though in reality puzzled and uneasy at something threatening in the atmosphere of this strange Court, he kept his eyes and ears on the alert, trying, if he might, to probe the mystery. If only he could have told his mother about the various things he had seen and guessed at these last few days. . . . But, after purchas-

ing a pair of gloves from that sinister Italian perfumer, René, she had died, and died mysteriously, never uttering a word. And the strange thing was that those gloves were nowhere to be found.

He refused to believe it was foul play—that she had been poisoned. He took a sanguine view of men and things. Besides, had not a post-mortem examination clearly shown there was nothing to arouse suspicion? True, for some time past now, people had been losing faith in post-mortem examinations.

Ah, how charming his young bride looked dancing the Italian minuet! He felt very much like loving her and going out of his way to make her love him. Her girlishness, her dark tresses, her peach-like complexion, her little pouting mouth, her lovely neck and shoulders which she kept undraped, and which the women stole up to and kissed, uttering little cries of delight—all this was mightily to his taste.

Howbeit, he was under no illusions about Marguerite. Be-mocking everything and everybody, himself included, he said, speaking of his marriage:

“The Court has got its Chancellor, its Secretary, its Treasurer, and its Jester. I shall be its Cuckold.”

Heralded by a cloud of perfume, a wondrous creature began to approach him. Was it man or woman?—Marguerite or her brother of Anjou? It was the princess herself, but close behind her came her brother garbed as an Amazon. Belarded with powder and paint, drenched with perfume, flaunting his bracelets, his necklaces and his ear-rings, there was nothing to distinguish him from a woman. With a soft, wheedling air he nestled his head upon his sister’s shoulder and then kissed her on the mouth in the Italian fashion.

Henry of Navarre clenched his fists. The latest lampoons on the Court gave out that the Queen-Mother had encouraged her darling son to have incestuous relations with his sister in order to spite her detested suitor.

“I wonder how much truth there is in that,” he muttered scep-

tically to himself. "Every one knows that when the poor little Duke spends the night with a woman, he has to stop in bed for a week to get over it."

Nothing on earth would have induced Navarre to forgo his smile. Seeing him, the young exquisite hastened to greet him, and delivered himself of an elaborate compliment, most euphuistically turned, no doubt, and evidently spiced with satirical innuendoes, for the courtiers laughed immoderately.

They fell to trying which of them could wing the most telling shaft at the bridegroom. But the bridegroom never lost his smile. To speed the time, he amused himself by arranging the fair ladies in order of merit.

At the licentious and sophisticated Court of the Valois the women doted on their bodies and glorified in them. All the talk was of delicious nights when one stole from one's husband's couch and crept into a lover's arms.

Navarre was looking forward to some blissful hours. Yet he was not so wrapped up in his thoughts as not to observe that Catherine had hastily withdrawn as soon as the banquet was over, and that the Duke of Guise was nowhere to be seen.

The masquerade continued far into the night. The bride and bridegroom seemed in no hurry to seek the seclusion of the nuptial chamber. Certainly no one encouraged them to do so.

In the antechamber of their apartment, the gentlemen and ladies of their suite were growing sleepy and beginning to nod. The tall wax candles were burning low and sadly in their sockets.

Marguerite's old nurse stole on tiptoe into the nuptial chamber. On a side-table, near the bed, she placed some damsons stewed in brine in which she had dissolved certain potent drugs. A bottle of syrup of Venus stood by the damsons. It was a recipe of Master Abbazia, the astrologer-magician, and was destined to dispose the wedded ones to love. But when, about ten o'clock next morning, she came back to see how all had passed off, she noticed that her witches' supper had been left untasted. On the bed lay Henry, sound asleep and breathing heavily; and beside him, Marguerite,

wide-eyed and deep in thought, a petulant, wry look playing about her lips. . . .

Catherine had sent for the Duke of Guise. For a whole hour she had been trying to bring it home to him that it was Coligny who had been responsible for his father's murder, ten years before. Child as he was, had he not sworn in the presence of the dead to avenge that heartless crime? But then, of course, how many young popinjays forget the vows they take?

The blue eyes of the young Duke shone with unwonted fire. Like every one else, he stood in awe of Catherine. He knew how uncertain she was, how deep, and how dangerous to any who tried to rob her of a tittle of her power. He did not want to be her tool, a mere pawn in the game.

For a whole hour the duel went on. They were about equally matched. At last the Duke rose and took his leave. The Queen-Mother had won!

Beneath the walls of the Louvre, all but hidden in the shadows, a group of Huguenot lords were talking together.

"I'm off to-night," whispered one of the number.

"But why?" said another, in astonishment. "Is it wise?"

"They fawn on us too much at this Court for my liking. I'd rather save my skin with the fools, than stay here and be slaughtered with the sages."

The Duke of Guise, his cloak muffled close about him, sped along through the darkness. He had orders for Maurevert, assassin-in-ordinary to his family.

The little sovereign lady of Navarre was all fordone with weariness. For four days running there had been nothing but masques and dances, dances and masques. They never got back to their quarters till dawn was breaking. Quite worn out, they flung themselves on the bed with never a thought for anything but sleep. Marguerite scarcely knew that she had a husband. Had it not been

for the bruises she took away with her from the bridal bed—bruises and a lingering smell as of a mountain-goat that took a deal of washing in a perfumed bath to banish, there would have been nothing to remind her that she was Queen of Navarre . . . nothing at all. . . .

"We were both so young and both so eager that nothing would have stayed us," said Henry later on. He always set himself up as an adept in the art of venery, yet he was continually being taken in.

The crown of Navarre was held in very scant esteem at the Court of France, and Marguerite, who had been hoping to console herself by playing the Queen, wept tears of rage and disappointment in her oratory, whose seclusion her husband never came to disturb.

Aloft in her chamber hung with black, Catherine wrote and wrote unceasingly, plastering the whole of Europe with her letters. That night a messenger arrived, wild-eyed and pale, and broke in upon her toil. Maurevert had struck, but the blow had glanced aside. Coligny was but scratched, and Ambroise Paré, the physician, was certain he would pull him through. But the Huguenots were in a mighty rage. They met together in council and fiercely demanded justice. Their speech was loud and menacing. And they were no mere handful.

Catherine duly measured the danger. She saw they would have to be mastered, these trouble-mongers, saw that the time to do it was now, when she had got them all together in Paris. Strike at the leaders; set fire to the whole brood in the Place de Grève. That was the thing to do.

She hastened to the King. Charles shuddered at the sight of her. He fled into his forge and began hammering away at a piece of iron with all his might, to make the sparks fly and keep his terrible mother at bay. But, undeterred, she clutched him by the arm and whispered dreadful tidings in his ear: there was a plot afoot against their lives—her life and his.

But he would not listen to a word of it. She had filled him with mistrust of every one of mark. Never a month went by but she

unearthed a plot against the King's person. He trusted her word no more. Coligny had put him on his guard against her.

"But your Coligny, they've slain him!" she exclaimed.

At that Charles's jaw dropped. The hammer slipped from his grasp. She brought all her powers of persuasion into play to convince him of the necessity of defending himself against these breakers of the peace who spoke of avenging their Admiral as if the King himself had been his murderer.

Long and terrible was the trial of strength between mother and son. At last, quite worn out, his eye fixed in a glassy stare, Charles gave in.

"Well, then, so be it. Kill, kill them all, all, so that not one shall survive to reproach me."

At a late hour that same night, the Duke of Anjou came sidling into his mother's room, wheedling and plaintive, a lap-dog in his arms, a rosary dangling from his fingers, a posy in his bonnet.

At the sight of him, Catherine's cold, impassive face lit up with pleasure. She idolised this son of hers.

So he did not want to marry that tough and crabbed morsel, Elizabeth of England! Well then, he shouldn't, the darling. Poland was asking for a king, and Poland, rugged and remote though it was, should be his till something better offered. And Alençon, the ill-favoured Alençon—let him wed the crowned virago if he could, a worthy daughter, she, of that Bluebeard, King Henry the Eighth.

But she forbade him to go forth that night. He could see all from one of the palace windows.

"See all? All what, mother?" he asked in his piping falsetto.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all, my dear. . . ."

Long, long she held him in her arms. If any ill should come to him, him of all others, it would be the death of her.

He promised to obey her wishes, and took his leave. Over the tall and shapely shadow cast by his retreating figure, the Queen-Mother made a sweeping sign of the Cross.

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW

RETURNING from a visit of courtesy which she had been to pay to the wounded Coligny, Marguerite, a prey to some mysterious foreboding, to some presentiment she could not define, repaired to her mother's apartment. As she entered, the long robe of an astrologer vanished through a half-open door. Catherine, interrupted no doubt in some consultation designed to lift the veil of the future, sternly ordered her daughter to return to her bridal chamber.

Who would have dared to disobey the injunctions of Catherine? But, as Marguerite was making a profound obeisance, her sister, who was weeping in a corner of the room, hurried forward and clutched her by the arm.

"Go not, sister," she murmured in an agonised voice. "Go not, I implore you."

The young bride, her alarm now thoroughly aroused, looked beseechingly at her mother who, waxing still more wroth, turned fiercely on the interrupter.

"Peace!" she cried. "You know not what you say."

"Madame," answered the poor distracted girl, "if they discover anything, they will wreak their vengeance on her."

"No ill will befall her, I tell you. Marguerite, go to your bed."

"Farewell, sister, farewell," said the afflicted girl in a voice broken with sobs.

Chilled to the marrow, beside herself with terror, the girl-queen bestowed a kiss on Catherine's hand and tremblingly withdrew. Through all the corridors of the palace there were whisperings and hurried colloquies. A vague unrest, something sinister, something terrible was in the air. Ever and anon men would arrive laden with weapons.

Marguerite knew well enough that her family bore her no good-

will. She had no one to take her part. Every one knew she had no influence. The Calvinists mistrusted her because of her religion, the Catholics because of her marriage. Some fifty gentlemen were crowding round the bed on which her husband lay fully dressed and accoutred for the fight. All were full of the attack on Coligny, saying they would slaughter every Guise that walked the earth, belauding the victim's exploits, breathing fire and fury. Navarre did his best to calm them. Just now, at the King's disrobing, he had plainly said that trouble was brewing and had begged leave to depart, together with all those, his companions, who had come to attend his wedding, and Charles had replied, "I will avenge Coligny. In the meantime stir not from my Court."

The Huguenot lords put small trust in the King's word, for Catherine, they knew, could twist him round her little finger.

The air in the crowded room was intolerably hot. Marguerite could scarcely breathe. She went to a window and flung it wide. The sky was wild and stormy. Throughout the city there were signs of a strange unrest. Something—but what?—was afoot. The Queen of Navarre sank down at her prie-dieu, and remained absorbed in prayer till her husband called to her and bade her come to bed. Behind a screen she divested herself of her gown of rich brocade so stiff that it could stand of itself, and, twining a rosary about her fingers, crept into bed, while all around were grouped the Gascon lords in close array, as though to defend their prince from some impending act of treachery. Among them were numbered some of the finest swordsmen in France.

The hours passed by in an atmosphere heavy with menace and loud with defiance. Their angry talk prevented them from becoming aware of the tumult, which, but a few paces from the Louvre, had broken out in the house where Coligny had his lodging. This time the assassins had done their work thoroughly. The Admiral was dead, and in the dead man's face the Duke of Guise had dealt a savage kick. But of all this the watchers knew nothing. They had heard not the shouts, "Kill! Kill!" which were now cleaving the darkness in every quarter of the city.



British Museum

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS

At daybreak, Henry, who had never closed his eyes the livelong night, sprang from his bed to go and play at tennis with his friends, waiting for the hour when the King would rise, for they were impatient to renew their demands for justice.

At length Marguerite fell into a slumber, watched over by her nurse. She was still asleep when the bell of the palace clanged forth the fatal summons.

Suddenly there came a violent knocking at her door. "Navarre! Navarre!" cried a voice in an agony of desperation. Starting up in terror Marguerite leapt from her bed. Outside, in the city, the tocsin was ringing wildly. Down in the courtyard, like flashing ribands of light, torches streaked the darkness.

"Open the door!" she cried to the nurse, thinking it was Navarre come back again. But a man she knew not, bathed in blood, flung himself upon her, clasping her wildly in his arms, and entreated her to save him. Frozen with terror she knew not what to think. Shrieking she fell with the stranger to the floor between the bed and the wall.

At that moment four archers rushed in brandishing their swords, bent on dispatching their quarry. But they dared not strike while the Queen's arms were about him lest they should wound her also. Now the captain of the guard appeared, and she pleaded with him to spare the stranger's life. With a laugh he granted her request.

With her woman's help, Marguerite lifted the wounded man on to her bed, then, changing her shift, for the one she was wearing was drenched with blood, and flinging a cloak about her, she sped away to her sister's room. Through all the corridors of the palace came echoing the clamour of stampeding feet and shrieks of terror and despair. Again a fleeing victim flung himself upon her, his breast bathed in his own warm blood. Her hair in wild disorder, pale as death beneath her rouge, she staggered against the blood-bespattered wall. Before her, through the reek of firearms, she saw pursuers and pursued, rushing, crashing to the ground, shouting, cursing. . . .

"Bleed them! Bleed them!" shouted one of the madmen. "Bleeding's as good in August as in May!"

The tocsin was ringing now from every steeple in Paris. Marguerite thought her hour had come. Over a pile of quivering dead she stumbled, picked herself up again, lost her satin slippers, and at last, more dead than alive, gained her sister's door. Before her very eyes they were slitting the throats of some of the very men who had passed the night around her bed. Two of the King of Navarre's dearest friends lifted imploring hands towards her. Alas, what could she do? Would not she herself be the next to die? And Navarre! Where was he?

And now indeed she missed him. There was none other to protect her. And for him too she felt a deep compassion, uncouth though he was and chief of an uncouth band. To him at least she owed her Queendom. What would befall her if he should die?

"My husband! My husband! Where is my husband?" she cried to the Captain of the Guard, who was supporting her.

"With the King, Madame. No harm will come to him."

"They are more useful as hostages, Condé and he," whispered one of her sister's women. "If he killed them, the King would be making the Guises too powerful."

But Marguerite knew her brother; knew how he loved to turn and twist the spear-head in the wound of a stricken animal, knew how he delighted to beat his squires and pages till the blood came. She had seen him in his fits of frenzied, ungovernable fury. He was not master of his impulses. His ruling passion was to kill. There was no telling what he might do.

She hastened away to the Queen-Mother, and flung herself weeping on her knees. Clad in her robes of solemn black, Catherine that night seemed more proud, more stately, more fraught with tragic grandeur than ever. What human sentiment, what prayer for mercy could ever move that cold, impassive statue, that sombre guardian of the Crown? Margot was about to abandon her appeal in despair, when she heard the statue giving utterance in Italian to these words:

"This day it is kind to be cruel; cruel to be kind."

Putting her hands to her ears, Marguerite fled in desperation to the King. Henry of Navarre was there with Condé, both of them leaning against the tapestried wall. They had been arrested and disarmed as they were making their way out of the palace. Thereupon Navarre, convinced that he was going to his death, turned to his companions and said:

"Farewell, my friends, God knows whether we shall ever meet again."

Amid the din of barking greyhounds, screaming falcons and the cachinnations of his jester, Charles IX, with the stubborn rage of the half-demented, kept saying over and over again, dagger in hand, "The Mass or death! The Mass or death!" Outside, in the streets, the slaughter still continued. Long-drawn cries of agony rent the air, adding fuel to the King's mad rage. Navarre was deathly pale. He saw that immediate submission alone could calm this homicidal maniac. Henry was a brave man. Already, a score of times, he had risked his life on the field of battle. But to die thus ingloriously, like a rat in a trap, at the hands of a mere lunatic . . . Besides, his religion was not so hard-and-fast a thing as all that. When he was a child of seven his father, whip in hand, had dragged him off to Mass. So, meek as a lamb, he made reply:

"I am ready to obey the King in all things."

But Condé made a grievous blunder. He flew into a passion. "I am answerable for my religion to God alone," he cried, "and I will never abandon the truth in obedience to a threat."

The King's mouth foamed with blood and slaver. "Rebel!" he shouted, "and spawn of a rebel! If within three days you have not changed your tune, I'll have you strangled!"

Crying, "Mercy! Mercy!" Margot seized her husband, covered him with her cloak, and with him flung herself at the King's feet. The King cast a look of contempt and loathing on the dishevelled, half-naked woman, besmeared with blood and tears, that lay grovelling before him. Unable to disengage himself from this frenzied suppliant, who clung to him and would not let him go,

frantically embracing his knees, he cursed her and, spurning her away with his foot, rushed out on to the balcony to gain a little air, for he felt as though he were about to choke.

The sun shone down on the Pré aux Clercs, on the blood-red Seine and lit up the horrible scenes of carnage. With ghastly eyes the King gazed down on the spectacle of blood, the blood of his subjects, and stood like one fascinated, rooted to the spot.

On all sides the work of murder and pillage went on. Not one escaped, unless he wore the white cross which the Catholics had adopted as their badge. The houses of the Huguenots had been marked the night before, and through the windows their bodies were hurled into the street below. Others impaled weeping children on their halberds, dragged the dead and dying along the bloody streets to the Seine, firing at the fugitives as they scrambled along the housetops. The gates of the city were barred, and no one got away. Dead bodies lay in heaps over the chains that had been stretched across the streets. Flying for their lives, men raced like hunted animals along the bank of the river, the pike-men hot on their heels. All the boats had been moored on the opposite side of the river. The unhappy wretches flung themselves into the water amid the execrations of their pursuers, who shouted:

"Blasphemous dogs, they have had their fill of firing convents, outraging nuns and butchering monks. Now their turn has come!"

Up on his balcony, the King was stamping with rage. The reek of blood, the cries of despair, all the circumstances of this dreadful man-hunt, turned him into a raving maniac.

"They run!" he shouted, "they run! Give me my arquebus!" Then, like a man recovering from a fit, the madman turned and came back into the room, his face all drawn and haggard. Navarre and Condé were no longer there. Flinging his smoking weapon from him, he began to grin and gibber, and bade someone bring his mistress to him, the gentle Marie Touchet.

From the embraces of that night of horror a son was born. In an adjoining room, the conjugal bedchamber, the young Queen,

Elizabeth of Austria, big with the daughter she was soon to bring into the world, lay wrapt in peaceful slumber, ignorant of all these dreadful happenings, clasping her Book of Hours. When she awoke and beheld the streets running with blood, she swooned away.

THE ORDEAL

CATHERINE had the head of Coligny embalmed, stuck a toothpick in its mouth to make it the more lifelike, and sent it to the Pope, who had long been asking for it. In return she begged the Pope to lend her a hundred thousand crowns, which she had no intention of repaying.

Egged on by her, the King explained to Parliament the reasons which had led him to give orders for the massacre.

"Coligny," he averred, "had resolved to exterminate us all—my mother, my brothers and myself—and to make himself King."

Followed by a brilliant procession, Charles IX, sniffing with relish the sickly smell of blood, rode in state through the streets of Paris, where slaughter and pillage still went on.

But the King's word did not suffice. The tidings of the massacre had been received with universal horror and execration, and, in order to vindicate his conduct to the world at large, it was resolved that confessions should be wrung from two prominent Calvinists who had managed to survive the tragedy.

Catherine had compelled the King of Navarre, now a prisoner in her hands, to beg the Pope to open his indulgent arms to him. She also made him undertake to restore the Catholic religion in Navarre, to throw over his friends and to show himself with the army which was about to lay siege to La Rochelle. Henry's complete submissiveness did not disarm her.

Briquemont and Cavagnes, two Calvinist leaders, were to be interrogated. She made up her mind that Henry should be present at the ordeal, together with the whole Court. There was a gleam of cruel irony in her eye as she commanded her son-in-law to enter the coach, which then drove off to the scene of the trial.

When, with quaking legs and aching heart, Navarre made his way into the torture-chamber, the executioner was busy at a rack



CHARLES IX

British Museum

on which an old man of seventy lay stretched in ghastly pain, his white locks matted together in an agony of sweat. For a moment Henry was overcome with horror. Then swiftly he recovered himself. Nothing he had seen these last few days, no detail of this waking nightmare was ever destined to be effaced from his murder-haunted memory.

"Was Coligny conspiring to kill His Majesty the King and our good Queen Catherine?" asked the inquisitor in a cold, impassive voice.

"No! No!" groaned the old man.

The torturer drove in another wedge, causing the victim's legs to crack at the joints. Again he put his question:

"Did that dog of a Coligny intend to kill His Majesty the King and our good Queen Catherine?"

"No! No!"

A sickening odour rose up from the body as the hot irons gripped the shrinking flesh, and a shriek, no longer recognisable as human, echoed along the sombre roof.

"Have pity on me. . . . I will show you how La Rochelle may be taken. . . . I planned the fortifications. . . . I know the vulnerable places. . . . You will never capture it without my aid."

"We reckon not of La Rochelle. Speak, confess that Coligny . . ."

"La Rochelle. . . . I will give it up. . . . Mercy. . . . Mercy . . ." cried the victim hoarsely.

The King of Navarre could not keep his eyes off this mass of bleeding pulp, in which he could no longer recognise his old companion, his mother's friend, so brave, so staunch on the field of battle . . .

Condé and Coligny, putting full confidence in him, had entrusted him with missions of the highest importance. When traitors abounded, he at any rate had always been true to his word.

Catherine narrowly scanned the features of her son-in-law. Not a sign did he betray of what was passing within him. And he never would. At a Court where every one wore a mask, he alone had no need of one. He already possessed such thorough mastery over

himself that God Almighty in person could never have divined his thoughts. From time to time, under pretext of giving a twist to his moustachios, he rubbed his cheeks to bring their colour back.

"If you do not speak, your children will share your fate," said the torturer in a menacing voice.

"I swear . . ."

"To-morrow it will be your children's turn. . . ."

"Ah, my children, my poor children! . . . Yes! Yes! He did! He did!"

"And will you repeat that confession in public?"

"I will! I will!"

Cavagnes, his alleged accomplice, who had been flung aside into a corner after a vain attempt to extract a confession from him by torture, though scarcely able to articulate, summoned up the last remnants of his strength and thus addressed this pitiful old man: "Fortify your heart, by thinking on the courage you so often showed on the field of battle."

Hearing those words, Briquemont reopened his haggard, blood-shot eyes, gave a glance at his companion and recanted what he had said. Again they put him on the rack. But he had taken heart again. Once more he was master of his soul. The words of a psalm arose from his agonised lips.

The King of Navarre clutched at the wall to keep himself from falling. With grim satisfaction Catherine saw that he was on the point of fainting. But he was not going to give her this joy. Recovering his self-control once more, he turned and rested a mocking glance upon her.

"Ah," thought she, "so he's not had enough even yet. Well," she went on fiercely, "he shall have his fill, the insolent young cub!"

She gave orders that they should now go on to the Place de Grève where the two human wrecks were to be suspended from a gibbet. They were carried thither on a hurdle.

When Briquemont and Cavagnes were nearing the place where they were to be hanged in the presence of their young leader, their

eyes met. What they imparted to one another must have been poignant enough, but no hint of it ever escaped.

Moved to pity at the sight, Marguerite drew closer to her husband and furtively pressed his hand. He returned the pressure with burning fingers, inwardly cursing his perfidious Margot. Her mask, black as it was, was not so black, thought he, as the soul which it dissembled. He was convinced in his own mind that she knew the object of their wedding, knew that this massacre had been planned and plotted long in advance. A pretty piece of treachery, in very truth. . . . Betwixt her and him, henceforth, lay a piled heap of forty thousand dead.

"What a brave trap is that little Margot of ours to catch such an army of Huguenot rats!" was the King's cynical comment.

Its blood-lust now fully aroused, the Court next set out for Montfaucon. Coligny's mutilated corpse, suspended head downwards, was dangling and creaking on the iron hooks of the gibbet. Charles IX, lankier, leaner, more bent, more sallow, more squint-eyed and wry-mouthed than ever, approached the dead body of the man whom in life he had called his father, and greeted it with the filthiest abuse.

The fine ladies of the Court, with brazen effrontery, went up and examined the naked bodies of the victims, recognising them by this or that intimate peculiarity, uttering the lewdest jests, going off into fits of ribald laughter.

As the corpses of the Huguenots hung rotting in the August sun, the crowd pelted them with mud and ordure. A terrible stench arose from their rotting, wormy corpses. The women held their noses. "The carrion of foes is sweet to smell," said Charles with a laugh.

A fire was kindled under Coligny's remains, and the nauseous stench of roasting human flesh filled the air and clung to them all the way back to the Louvre.

Catherine was furious. She conceived a fierce hatred for this disconcerting son-in-law of hers who, as soon as he got back to the palace, began to laugh and caper and turn everything to buf-

foonery. She had never been able to get the upper hand of the mother. Was the son too going to make a mock of her?

Navarre had "put an antic disposition on" lest he should be tempted to despair. Many a time in the years to come he was called on to play the madman, to make believe his soul was dead.

Catherine sent for Marguerite. The marriage should be annulled and this fox-cub sent back to his mountains with a slow poison in his belly. His wife should be wedded again to some king or other, or, better still, shut up in a convent. That would tame the heyday in her blood a little.

"My daughter," said Catherine, "tell me truly, swear that you will, is your husband—a *man*?"

"Madame," replied Margot, with a fine show of innocence, "never having known any man but him, I cannot well make answer. But be the matter as it may, you have yoked me to him and with him I must needs abide."

But these corpses which choked the streams and lay rotting about the countryside, for it was forbidden to give them burial, tainted the air and attracted all manner of beasts and birds, particularly crows. A week after the massacre the Louvre was invaded by huge flocks of black-plumed birds and oppressed with the beating of innumerable wings. Day after day they gathered together, winging their way in from every quarter of the sky. Volley upon volley was fired at them, but all in vain. On and on they came, an endless host. It seemed as though the very skies were moulting sable feathers.

Superstitious folk were seized with terror. Even the doughtiest felt their hair stand up on end. At night Charles would roam feverishly about his apartment, stopping his ears with his fingers, or sounding strident blasts on his horn to drown the clamour of these birds of evil omen. The guards did their best to disperse the croaking horror, but all their efforts were in vain. For a whole week the crows refused to be dislodged, nor did they depart so long as a single shred of human flesh remained for them to pick.

HENRY AND CHARLOTTE

IN her chamber heavily draped with black, Catherine de' Medici sat alone. Rising from her seat, she extinguished the candle, went over to the wall and drew aside the funereal hangings that had remained there ever since Henry II died, fifteen years before.

Hard by the secret cupboard in which she kept her opiates, her poisons and her antidotes, as well as the pearls she was collecting one by one (for she was terribly short of money) for a necklace she intended to bestow on her favourite son, the new King of Poland, there appeared a little orb of light. The Queen-Mother had caused holes to be drilled in the walls of all the royal castles and had had listening-tubes fixed in all the floors. . . .

Catherine took a peep at the King of Navarre, who was pacing to and fro with the long strides of the practised mountaineer. The room was low and narrow and the windows were fitted with iron gratings. Sometimes he would stop and pass a comb through his moustache, or besprinkle himself with perfume, or amuse himself with his quails. Some Spanish wine, sherbet and *conserves de rose* furnished forth one of the tables. But he touched none of it. His abstemiousness was decidedly unwelcome to the Queen-Mother.

He was obviously getting near the end of his patience. All of a sudden, there came a gentle tapping at the door, and at once his face grew radiant. A young woman appeared on the scene. He took her tenderly in his arms. It was Charlotte de Sauves, the most cunning spy and most formidable enchantress of all Queen Catherine's flying squad. She was so pretty, so dainty, so gentle! She looked, in short, like a fair-haired angel. As a matter of fact she was the deepest little baggage in the whole Court. She would have sent half the kingdom to the gallows without so much as a tremor. In her delicate veins, to which the young lover put his lips at her slender wrist, there flowed the cruel blood of the Sades.

She only used her charms to ensnare and betray, and victims she had in plenty: the Duke of Alençon, Catherine's youngest and uncared-for son; Du Gast, the King of Poland's minion; Souvre; the King of Navarre; Charles IX himself. But Guise it was who was really sovereign of her heart. Him she betrayed not, him she loved—no brief tale of years—to the very end.

Henry took his mistress by her little dimpled chin and scolded. He was very much in love and very jealous, for Du Gast had just written to his innamorata with a pen dipped in his own blood. Charlotte defended herself with great address, not entirely removing the thorn, keeping him still a little on tenter-hooks. And then she gave him a very spirited account of the amours of Marguerite with the dainty—too dainty—Saint-Luc, who was playing havoc with the heart of Poland's sovereign lord.

Henry only laughed. He knew it all. His misfortunes were flung in his face often enough. The gossips of town and Court dubbed him the "King of the Cuckolds." They took good care that he should know it, and he—he did but outlaugh the others at his own mischance. What else *could* he do? Who would be afraid of a man in prison? But patience; let them wait awhile.

"Sweetheart mine . . . give over talking. I love you madly."

"I don't believe a word of it!"

"Really! What then must I do to convince you?"

"If you loved me you would never think of leaving me."

"But do I? . . . It is lovely here with you, and my kind brother the King, and my kind mother, Queen Catherine."

"You are planning to go and take the field at the head of your heretics."

"I! *Ventre-Saint-Gris!* I trow not indeed! Didn't I go and lay siege to them in La Rochelle? What further proof do you ask? I am a Catholic, and a most loyal son to the King of France. Come hither, star of my life, and give me your pretty mouth to kiss. That is the only kind of war I am fain to wage. What! Tears? You are weeping?"

"Sire, you kiss me and despise me. I want your confidence.

You give me your caresses. How should I be proud of that?"

"I see too well you do not love me, Charlotte."

"Should I be here if I did not love you?"

"Well then; mark the fleeting hour, sweet prattler. How say you? Shall we not spend our time to better purpose, sweetheart? I like talking well enough, but I like kissing better. I'll soon show you how I love you!"

The sight that greeted her eyes made the Queen-Mother smile a pitying smile. Ah, the hardy mountaineer! More skilled in war than in the lists of love! Oh, he was a man, a very proper man. What zest, what ardour! But rough and ready as any coarse *soldado*. It was not thus he would make the Queen-Mother's sophisticated young women cry out for quarter. Catherine knew well that Charlotte loved Guise above all others—Guise, who had inherited all the libidinous vices of the Borgias.

In the breathing-space betwixt two bouts, Charlotte called up all the resources of her coquetry—cajoled him, coaxed him, and plied him with questions. But her lover was on his guard. What a man it was, to be sure! In all the two long years of his captivity, never once had he betrayed himself. *Was* there anything to betray? Had he a secret? Catherine was beginning to doubt it. If he whispered low in the dim-lit chamber, it was but to murmur the honeyed trifles of a lover. He had convinced the world at large of his obedience, his resignation. Only the old Italian dame, herself the most patient and most guileful plotter, still retained a few shadowy remnants of doubt. If only she could make him lose his temper. She often contrived to wring folk's secrets from them so—putting them in a fury, while she herself was calm. She had done her best to play off this trick on Navarre. Once and once only, after one of his many vain attempts to escape, his rage had got the better of him.

"I swear to God," he had burst out in a tempest of passion, "that I'll hack my way to freedom with my dagger here. If I fail, I'll burn the place down."

She had his dagger taken from him!

Then, betwixt two amorous encounters, Charlotte told him of Marguerite's scandalous behaviour with Gilonne de Thorigny, one of the maids of honour. He did but laugh the louder. . . .

There came a rap at the door. "Open, in the King's name!"

It was the Captain of the Guard come to carry out his nightly inspection of the prisoner's quarters. Henry was pleased to keep him waiting. Charlotte, who had set about arranging her dress with a sort of feline grace, had to hunt about for her velvet slippers. At last she put on her mask, and the King turned and went to open the door. The corner of a letter was just visible, sticking out beneath a book. Quick as lightning, she snatched it up. Then, her attire not quite as orderly as it might have been, she walked out of the room, the Captain bowing to the ground as she passed.

The guards thrust about with their swords under the bed, felt up and down between the tumbled sheets with their big coarse hands, diligently poked about in every nook and corner, opened chests and boxes, and at last took their departure, turning the key in the lock.

No sooner was he alone than Henry began to shower a torrent of passionate kisses on a bracelet made out of his mistress's hair. Suddenly, overcome by a sensation of faintness, he rose and staggered towards the bed, but fell in a swoon before he reached it.

"That," laughed Catherine softly to herself, "is how we clip the wings of our high-flying goslings!"

Charlotte, all pink and white and artless as a child, went to the Queen-Mother to tell her all about her exploits. Catherine, who kept herself unsullied amid the corruption she encouraged, held her in scant esteem.

"Come, my little one, you work with a will. But the fox is cunning. Now, let us see that letter."

"Monsieur de Miosseins," it ran, "the Court is the strangest you did ever see. We give and take caresses by the thousand, and are always ready to cut each other's throats. We wear a dagger, a coat

of mail and often a corslet underneath our cloaks. The King goes as much in danger of his life as I do; he loves me more than ever. I am only waiting my chance to begin a little battle. They say they will kill me; but I want to get my blow in first."

Catherine clenched her teeth. She hated him like poison. So he would get his blow in first, would he? Curse him! Catherine was now opposed to shedding blood. It left traces behind it. Her troop of rascally Italians had a safer weapon than that—poison!

"To rid Your Majesty of your enemies I only need a few cooks," said Birague to the King of France, who had made him Keeper of the Seals.

The vitality, the rude health of the young Bourbon, compared with the sickliness and delicacy of her own children, made her gorge rise with anger. She would take good care that Nostradamus' prophecy about Henry's succeeding to the throne, to the whole kingdom, should never come to pass. That she could easily do. She had him under lock and key.

Marguerite ordered the door of her husband's room to be forced open. Her little lap-dog ran in before her and began to yap furiously. The shriek she uttered when she saw Henry stretched, apparently lifeless, on the ground, was drowned by the barking of the dog.

She felt the prostrate figure all over, tried his pulse, looked at his pupils. No; it was not what she had feared. It was but the result of his excesses with Charlotte; Charlotte, the detestable siren who was trying to make him hate his wife.

As he showed no signs of returning consciousness, she summoned her women and her husband's attendants. Would he die? Their common misfortunes were tending to become a bond of union between them. She knew as well as he that if she had a son the King would at once have Henry put to death as no longer serving any useful purpose. And the scant esteem in which the prisoner was held, a kinglet who, in season and out of season, was always being made the subject of venomous lampoons, who was sneered

at and jeered at and spoken to as you would speak to a page or a Court lackey—all this was more than she could bear. They might have loved each other like the Babes in the Wood, if only . . .

Saint Pons, Marguerite's doctor, arrived on the scene. He looked at first somewhat dismayed, and confessed that he had been sounded to find out whether he would consent to administer poison.

At last Henry opened his eyes and saw his wife. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "I've been rather hard put to it to-night. . . ."

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders. Henry looked at her long and quizzically. How fair she was, how radiant, how dazzling! He would have adored her if only . . . But she was always playing him false, and in every sort of way. Close to Compiègne, when the Court were returning to Paris, he was on the point of getting clear away when Margot let her mother into the secret, and her mother had him more strictly guarded than ever. However, he bore her no lasting grudge for that. He knew that Catherine could worm a secret out of a dead saint.

"So it appears, then, my dear, that men are no longer enough for you?"

They quarrelled so fiercely that Marguerite departed, wounded to the quick, and for a long time afterwards, she neither slept with him nor spoke to him. Which was no great deprivation to either.

THE HEAD OF LA MOLE

THE Court came back in a mighty fluster from Saint Germain. Four cardinals, borne on the wings of panic, hanging on like grim death to the heads—or the tails—of their mules, bumped and jostled into everything that happened to be in their way. The King's litter, with torch-bearers going on before, followed more slowly, for a jolt meant agony to the dying man.

Madame Catherine, anxious to make him as easy as possible, cavalcaded at his side. The Huguenots had been plotting to kidnap Navarre and to put weathercock Alençon on the shortly-to-be-vacated throne. Catherine, whose spies were everywhere, got wind of the conspiracy and shut herself up with her detested son. Abject with terror, he confessed whatever she told him to confess.

When Navarre heard that the two of them were together, he knew well enough how the land lay. "Good," he said to himself, "our man has told her all." He denied that he had ever thought of putting Alençon in the place of Charles. "All the same," he said, "I am not particularly happy in my captivity, and if I try to escape, no one can reasonably complain; and try I shall, every time I see a chance."

Catherine visited her wrath upon him then and there. Navarre and Alençon were immediately clapped into the fortress of Vincennes, while the smaller fry among the conspirators encumbered the other prisons. There remained the two go-betweens, whom the Queen-Mother hated like poison: La Mole and Coconnas.

"My son," said she to the King, who was spitting up the last remnants of his lungs, "two wax dolls with crowns on them have been found at La Mole's. One was half-melted and the other had been pierced through the heart. That is why you are ill. 'Tis sorcery."

"La Mole? Margot's lover, do you mean?"

"The same."

"Sdeath! He escaped me once; but this time I'll strangle him with my own hands."

"That's the hangman's task, my son."

"Ah," groaned the King, "can't they let me die in peace?"

Back again in Paris, the Queen-Mother, having given her orders, withdrew to her chamber. No! Alençon should *not* have that throne. She was keeping it for the King of Poland. For months past she had known that Charles IX was going to die, and so, at the frontier, when she said farewell to her beloved Henry of Anjou, she whispered in his ear:

"Go, my son, you will not be in Poland long."

Now Marguerite was in the room waiting for her mother, but her mother, taking not the slightest heed of her, sat herself down at her writing-desk. A little pet monkey leapt on to her knees and began to mop and mow.

"Madame," Marguerite began, "spare La Mole, I beseech you, for my sake."

"What, you dare to plead with me on behalf of a paramour?"

"Ah, mother, my mother . . . I have never been happy here, as you know full well. Every one that bore me any love you tore away from me . . . and gave me to that little he-goat. . . . Leave me La Mole. . . . I love him. . . . I will quit the Court for ever. . . . You shall never hear of me again, I swear it. . . . I will relieve you of my presence. . . . Spare him, mother, only spare him! Poor La Mole. He is but a child, a lad from Provence. He has never plotted in his life. Those wax figures—that was I. He has long loved me, but I am a queen and he mistrusted the power of his good graces. He is very devout. He never goes without his scapular, never! . . . Howbeit, to make sure of my love, he had recourse to a sorcerer, bidding him in his name make a pact with the devil. They moulded little waxen images in my likeness, put my crown on their head and, stabbing them in the heart, have thus bewitched me. But, mother, they had no need of sorcery for that. . . . You

see, then, 'tis no plot. Spare, oh, spare him for my sake! I implore you on my knees."

For all reply, the Queen-Mother took a quill and calmly nibbed it. Then, with a firm hand, she wrote these words:

"See to it, Master Attorney, that that matter is despatched forthwith.
CATHERINE."

Marguerite fled from the room, which suddenly seemed to scorch her feet. She fled to Vincennes and wandered, like one distraught, round and round the sombre prison, tearing at the doors with her nails, wailing through the stormy night. From his room in the tower above her lover could look down on her. But, for her, there was but one thing, one thought in the world: La Mole was about to die!

His eyes full of a voluptuous, oriental languour, the witchery of his voice, his sweet, caressing ways—was she to be robbed of all these things? Loathed by her mother, hated by her brothers, scorned by her husband, she had found oblivion and consolation in the passionate devotion of La Mole. Ah, let them kill her too, she could not live without him!

Behind the fortress walls, the executioners divested the doomed man of his perfumed raiment, unclasped an *agnus dei* which he wore about his neck, and bound him to the rack. His comely, naked body, so carefully tended, with skin so soft, was marred by scars.

"I received many a wound in the King's service," said La Mole.

The executioners paid no heed.

"Do with me as you will," murmured the sufferer, closing his silken eyelids.

In the grip of the red-hot pincers, the seared flesh quivered.

"Are you going to speak?"

"I have nothing to say."

Then, to break down his resistance, they had recourse to the

cruellest torture of all, the ordeal of water. At the fourth pint the unhappy man began to speak.

"Is there no way of winning mercy? All I ask is to be shut up in a monastery, there to spend the remnant of my days in prayer."

"Had you any confederates in the castle?"

"None. God curse my soul if I had a single one."

"What were you doing with waxen images, pierced through the heart, in your house? Were they images of the King?"

"Oh, God strike me dead if ever I made a waxen image of the King."

"Then whom did they portray?"

"A lady of Provence whom I loved and of whom I was fain to be loved."

"What, with a crown on her head?"

"Ah! God. . . ."

At the seventh pint, which is the last but one of the *question extraordinaire*, the victim cried:

"Gentlemen, I know naught else, by my soul's perdition. I know naught else, by the living God and my soul's damnation. 'Tis true, Eternal God! My God, I know naught else."

Then he said no more. With the sweat pouring from them, the executioners let him be.

"Marguerite! Marguerite! Marguerite!" cried La Mole softly, under his breath.

But what could Marguerite do now?

The poor body, all dislocated and swollen, was roped to one side of the altar in the chapel of the Conciergerie; Coconnas, oozing with blood, lay helpless on the other. There they were both to pass the night. In the morning they were to be beheaded in the Place de Grève.

Before a statue of Christ, a taper was guttering to its end. So it was with these men's lives. Day dawned—pale and wintry. A priest entered.

At a window looking down on the fatal scene, Marguerite sat

weeping. The whole of that hideous night she had spent in pleading for her lover's life. In vain.

The tumbril rattled noisily on to the square, which was black with people. The Queen of Navarre had no strength left to cry aloud.

To the courtiers, who delighted in these scenes and had pushed their way to the front, Coconnas said:

"Gentlemen, you perceive the little ones are taken, and the great ones, they who did the deed, go free."

The headsman's assistants lifted La Mole, whose legs were broken, on to the scaffold. He took the cross that was held out to him. As he looked his last on the daylight that shone on the sea of human faces, he perceived the flutter of a handkerchief at a far-off window. Then he turned away, suffered them to bandage his swimming eyes, and laid his head upon the block.

The people prayed aloud. Her hands clasped convulsively over her heart, Marguerite's eyes were riveted to the spot. The blow fell. With a piercing shriek she fainted.

When she opened her eyes again, the crowd was silently melting away. The populace no longer believed in these alleged conspiracies; they were sick of the sight of blood. The men thus doomed to die were both of them young, handsome, popular and brave. Nothing had been wrung from them even under the most horrible of tortures. It was whispered that the King was in his death agony at the Louvre, poisoned by his mother. This was too much to be borne with. Let her take herself home to Florence, the Italian hag!

The two heads, drained of their blood, were fixed for all to see upon a gibbet, while horsemen carried off the bodies hewn into quarters, to hang them up at the city gates as an example and a warning.

When night came, Marguerite, masked and wrapt in a cloak edged with fur, went with tottering steps to seek the executioner. He must sell her her lover's head and heart. The executioner told her that archers were on guard at the gibbets. It was easy enough

to drag out the heart. But the head, that was impossible. Nothing could be done.

Feverishly, madly, Marguerite added to the purchase money, flinging on the axe that lay upon the table, handfuls of the splendid jewels she had wellnigh bartered her soul to possess.

At last the man consented to do her bidding.

"It so happens that I shall presently have to cut off the head of a handsome young bearding who is wondrous like your lover, my pretty one. I will get the archers to come with me to the tavern, and my man shall put the head of the substitute a little higher up. To-morrow, no one will be a whit the wiser."

In the room, huddled on a low stool, the Queen of Navarre waited long for the executioner's return. Would he succeed? How slow he was! Would he never come? Day was almost dawning when at last he appeared, bringing the head and the heart in his cloak. Marguerite took the beloved head in her trembling hands, gazed at it long, kissed the lips, the veiled lids, the beard, to which the odour of the living man still clung, the perfume of love.

"My beloved! oh, my love!"

She embalmed it herself, detached the pearls from her ears, put them on the ears of the dead, laid the beloved head on a couch of satin in a rich leaden casket, and, the following night, her precious burden on her knees, was driven to Montmartre.

Against the brilliant, starry background, the arms of a windmill were turning in the chill winter wind. The Abbess of the convent, where the Queen of Navarre often came to perform her devotions, herself opened the door. A messenger had forewarned her. She received the Queen with tears, and, in the dim light of the chapel, heavy with the scent of incense, the two women buried La Mole's head before the altar. Then, their melancholy task accomplished, they fell on their knees and passed the remainder of the night in prayer.

Pale, more alluring than ever in her mourning weeds, disdain and hatred blazing in her clear, bright eyes, Marguerite appeared again at Court. People said she slept in sheets of black satin which gave an added lustre to her lovely limbs.

A pochette richly embroidered with pearls hung from her hooped skirt. In it was her lover's heart. This adulterous widowhood so ostentatiously displayed filled Catherine with fury. This girl of hers had ever been a thorn in her flesh. She had a stricter watch than ever kept upon Navarre, feeling sure that out of pure revenge she would encourage him to escape and sow disorder in the kingdom, between the death of Charles and Henry's homecoming.

And it was a fact that Marguerite, who was free to go in and out of the Château as she listed, did conceive the idea of dressing her husband up in women's clothes and smuggling him, masked, into her coach, and so get him away. But he told her that he was much too closely guarded for his absence not to be immediately discovered. Marguerite looked him up and down disdainfully. Did he, or did he not, want to escape? She knew not what to make of such a captive. When he was not love-making, he would be playing cards, or amusing himself with his birds. Sometimes he was allowed to go hunting, but ten guards were always in attendance, and never let him out of their sight.

"What does he really want?" Marguerite asked herself. "Doesn't he care what happens to him? Or is this seeming indifference only a blind? If he is a prisoner in peril of his life, so, too, am I. I mean to be a queen. I intend to rule and to have my revenge. No more bending the knee for me! I do not want to see my mother or my brothers any more. But it is Charlotte de Sauves that is holding him in thrall with those white arms of hers. Clearly he would give up Navarre, his hopes, his very life for her, since he lingers here despite the perils which encompass him. I have told him that his precious sweetheart is nothing but a spy set on him by my mother. But does he believe me? Does he listen?"

The Queen of Navarre shrugged her shoulders in despair. Then she took up the new Book of Hours with which Bussy d'Amboise had just presented her, and began to turn its pages. It was, in fact, a collection of bawdy sonnets written by Aretino to go with Jules Romain's erotic pictures.

REMORSE

CHARLES IX could endure his bed no longer. The hand of death was on him. Aimlessly he rushed about hither and thither, hunted unceasingly, wound his horn fiercely enough to split his weasand, and brought up streams of blood. But despite all this restlessness, he could not escape from the ghosts that pursued him. All this tumult did not avail to drown the voice of his remorse.

Since Saint Bartholomew's Eve he had hunted five thousand dogs until they dropped, and had been the death of sixty thousand francs' worth of horseflesh. He lavished gifts on churches. He would batter his head against the wall and moan, and every night they brought him Marie Touchet. He knew no peace save in her arms, he clutched her in frenzied embraces, and thus sapped the last remnants of his waning strength.

He ate and drank nothing save what was prepared for him by his foster-mother. It was generally held that he had been poisoned.

And now he never left his room. There he sat, his crown on his head, his mantle, embroidered with fleurs-de-lys, about his shoulders. His wandering speech betrayed his weakened mind. His strident laughter, his loud complaints, his blasphemies and his fierce denunciations, heard through the thickness of the walls, made the ladies of the Court grow pale beneath their masks.

"The great seldom go to the grave dry-throated," remarked the King of Navarre's squire, d'Aubigné.

Catherine staged a crowning scene. They swore to the dying King that murderers were hiding in the castle. There was a great beating of the coverts, but no game was unearthed. On 9th May, Catherine declared she had found some gunpowder under her bed. They evidently intended to murder her. She really must be ap-

pointed regent during the King's illness, or all authority would be at an end, the whole country would go to rack and ruin.

Charles IX turned his glazed orbs upon his mother. For the first time in his life, he found himself looking someone in the face.

"So, mother," said he, "I am going to die?"

Softly she lowered her heavy eyelids; then stole from the room to write a letter to the King of Poland.

"Leave everything," the letter ran, "and come at once. But take care of yourself, my son, for if I came to lose you, I would be buried alive with you in the self-same grave."

All this time the poor King was trying to quit his bed and flee; but Death was upon him, Death had driven its talons into him, into his poor wasted chest, like some evil beast that lives by sucking human blood. He struggled and struggled and did but grow the more exhausted. Upon this frightful death-agony the faces on the tapestried walls looked down.

No one came to see him. Alençon had been clapped into prison. They were too much afraid of his taking the dying man's place. As soon as the King of Poland arrived, the unloved one could, if he so desired, go to that land of savages and reign there in his stead. Catherine would thus be rid of him. Margot was far too deeply occupied with Bussy d'Amboise. His old nurse and Marie Touchet were the only ones that tended him. Sometimes, very timidly, his wife would steal into the sick-room, the Emperor's daughter, meek, devout, charming. She sat as far away as possible from that pock-marked countenance, said a few prayers, shed a few tears, and went away again without a word.

The King's poets were already paying their court to the haughty Catherine. But Remy Belleau was loyal and remained at his post, a gaunt figure in a plentifully patched doublet, for, well as the King loved musicians and poets, he did not overburden them with riches.

"Treat 'em like good horses," he used to say. "Feed them well, but don't pamper them."

And mournfully Remy Belleau sat reading aloud to the dying man the despairing maxims of Ecclesiastes.

The nurse, seated on a chest, drew near from time to time, wiped away the terrible sweat, the tears, and the bloody slaver that gathered about the mouth of her nursling. Convulsively he pressed her hand.

"Ah, my nurse, my darling nurse, what bloodshed and what murders! Ah, what evil counsels did I follow! Oh, my God, pardon me and have mercy on me, if it please Thee!"

When on the point of death, he asked for his brother-in-law, whom at heart he had always loved. Terror alone had made him cruel towards Navarre, towards his subjects; terror had made him mad.

"I should like to put my arms about old Henry just once more." Catherine was mistrustful. She tried to talk him out of the idea. He was still capable of signing some order or other revoking the Letters Patent appointing her Regent which had only been promulgated that morning. He insisted. They had to let him have his way. He was still the King. But she promised herself she would be present at that last interview.

And to begin with, she would frighten Navarre, so that he should plainly see that Charles IX was of no account now, without her; that she alone would rule the country until Henry of Anjou returned to France.

On either side of a long, dimly lighted gallery she posted armed men of truculent appearance. They were Piedmontese, and everybody knew they were hers, body and soul. To reach the royal bed-chamber, Navarre had to pass between these bravoës, to feel the point of their pikes grazing his neck, their poniards caressing his loins.

When he reached the end of this gallery, he could go no farther. If the King sent for him with this display of force, it was surely to kill him. Henry remembered that Charles IX had almost stabbed his brothers and the Duke of Guise.

"These men belong to the Queen-Mother," he said to himself in his agitation. "That is worse than ever. There is no way out. And just as I was within reach of my goal!"

On reaching the threshold, he fell on his knees and dragged himself thus humbly to the bedside of the King, who stroked his head, commending to him his wife, his daughter, and the son he had had by Marie Touchet, and even the kingdom itself!

"If I had consented to believe all they told me about you, you wouldn't be alive now. Put no trust in . . ."

"Monsieur!" cried Catherine, whose mask-like face now interposed between them, "say not that."

"Madame, say it I must, because it is the truth."

The King began to gasp for breath. The doctor hurried to his side. The Queen-Mother, standing at the window, drew aside the curtain and gazed along a road which stretched away and away towards the east. The springtime was laughing in the blue sky, through which the swallows winged their way.

"Ah," sadly murmured Charles once more, "must I then die? At twenty-four? Mother, I want you."

Catherine turned. Her son was even then breathing his last.

Still on his knees, Navarre was awaiting his sentence. Catherine looked at him for a moment, then drew herself up to her full height. She had not finished her sport with him yet. Before killing it, the spider plays with the fly that has become entangled in its web.

"Away with him," cried the Queen Regent, "and cast him into the deepest dungeon in Vincennes!"



A MIGNON OF HENRY III

THE ESCAPE

A YEAR had gone by. The Duke of Anjou, who had fled from Poland, not without the crown jewels, had just been anointed King of France at Rheims, under the name of Henry III.

Catherine was radiant. She looked years younger. Lighthearted, affable, she forgot to set people at loggerheads, forgot to brew mischief, well content to be able to go on reigning.

For the multitude of letters to be written, Councils to be presided over, grim-visaged Ambassadors to receive in audience—all this sort of thing wearied the new King. He delegated his duties to his mother, who was only too delighted to perform them.

Henry III had recently married a little chit of no importance, Louise de Vaudemont, over whom he had gone crazy on his way through Lorraine.

The young bride spent most of her time praying that she might have a son. She and her husband went to Chartres on foot to implore the Virgin to grant them issue. Catherine, being of little faith, was burning to give the pious little ninny the advice her old uncle, Pope Clement VII, had given her when she married Henry II.

“Get yourself with child, no matter how.”

Thank God there were plenty of young lords at Court only too eager to render this service to the King, it being, so the doctors said, out of the question for him to become a father.

Henry III oscillated between the outrageous brutality of the swaggering *soldado* and the mincing puerilities of the constitutional hermaphrodite. He organised indecent dancing displays, and then suddenly went off to make a retreat in a monastery; he whisked away all the little dogs in the capital and organised processions of flagellants. He dressed himself up in women's clothes, decked himself out with diamonds, and then suddenly flung the

whole outfit away, donned a monk's habit and sprinkled ashes on his perfumed head.

He was tenderly affectionate towards his wife, but it was his favourites who governed him. While telling the beads of his rosary, each bead a tiny skull, he lent an ear to all kinds of bawdy tales about the moral delinquencies of his Court. He was already coming to be known as Sardanapalus.

Henry of Navarre, beholding these things, was highly amused. When, reclining at ease on his silken cushions, with a little dog clasped against the necklaces of pearl upon his wheezy chest, the King of France found the time pass slowly, Henry would chaff him with his mordant, mocking humour.

If Sardanapalus liked the husband, he loathed the wife. After that strange passion which they had had for one another, hatred had supervened, a fierce, undying hatred that nothing would ever quench—nothing. Hardly had he arrived, when they recounted to him in every detail his sister's manifold adventures. Bussy d'Amboise, who went so far as to deck his bonnet with the colours of his royal mistress, was sent into immediate exile. Her tender, far too tender confidante, Gilonne de Thorigny, was shut up a prisoner within four walls. But already Marguerite was finding consolation in the arms of that handsome and insolent young hot-head, *le bel Entraguet*.

The Duke of Alençon, who had snatched his freedom to go and join the reformers and put himself at their head, issued proclamations which the Queen-Mother, still suspicious, showed to Navarre.

"I know well enough what all these manifestos are good for," said he, with a loud guffaw. "They made me sign enough of them when I was with the Huguenots. Before many weeks are over, Monsieur will have some fine tales to tell of them and of the gentry who set him to work. To begin with, he will be their master, but, slowly and surely, they'll get the upper hand of him. I've taken the measure of those gentlemen."

"Verily," thought Catherine, whose keenness of vision had been dulled by her felicity, "verily the snake is harmless."

Navarre's idea was that, before a fortnight was out, Alençon would betray his party and come and weep in his mother's bosom. He was not a man, the poor, sickly monstrosity. And a man was what the party needed—sorely. If the reformers had had a leader at that moment, these disease-ridden Valois would have been swept off the face of the earth, and peace would have reigned once more in France. . . .

But Henry continued to laugh, to go a-hunting and to fondle his Charlotte, who had had too much of it by half, and urged him roundly to depart.

At night, however, his dreams set him free. He would wake up shouting orders to a Huguenot army in his native Gascon. Well it was that he slept alone. One night when his faithful squire d'Aubigné, the future grandfather of Madame de Maintenon, and his gentleman-in-waiting were nursing him in one of those feverish attacks to which he was so liable, they were amazed to hear him singing under his breath a psalm lamenting his separation from his friends.

"Ah, Sire," cried d'Aubigné in a transport of delight, "can it be that the spirit of the Lord is working within you? You sigh at the absence of your friends, and they, to a man, are sighing for you and striving to compass your freedom. Alas, while they are fighting your foes you are aiding and abetting them. They fear God and God alone, but you are in terror of a woman. You wring your hands. They clench their fists. They are on horseback, you are on your knees. What strange whim possesses you that you should choose to be servant here, when you might be master yonder? Are you not weary of hiding behind a mask? It would be different if their wretched palace were a safe place for you, but you could run no greater risk than staying here. As for ourselves, we have a good mind to try and escape to-morrow. Bethink you, Sire; when we are gone, the hands that serve you will not stick at poison or the knife for your undoing."

"Think you, my friends, that I am here of my own accord? How many times have I attempted to escape, and failed? If I play

the part of the fond and foolish lover, 'tis but to put my gaolers off the scent and prevent myself from dying of grief."

Henceforward the prince affected more freedom of mind. He danced, he sang, became more dashing, more free of speech than ever, learnt to play at cup-and-ball, to talk like an exquisite, was up to countless drolleries, the most comic buffoon at Court. His great laugh, ringing so loud and clear beneath the painted ceilings of the Louvre, gave all those neurasthenics some bad attacks of nerves. Prisoner though he was, he was the merriest soul in France.

Daringly he kissed his mother-in-law, flattered her, cajoled her, mystified her. She could not do without him.

He used to hide himself, wore out his guards with perpetual alarms, and then came back and laughed in their faces. One night he disappeared completely. Catherine flew into a rage. Angrily she cross-questioned d'Aubigné, who calmly replied that his master was in his room hunting quails with his falcon.

"But he is *not* in his room."

"But he *is*, Madame. Someone's been telling more tales about my master; I can see that quite well."

It was even as he said. Henry was in his room, right enough. Another evening he did not return from the chase, though a dozen guards had been following on his heels. D'Aubigné hadn't a notion where he was. Marguerite had not set eyes on him for weeks. This time the Queen-Mother thought the bird had flown in earnest. The King of France had to have his feet tickled for two whole hours before he went to sleep.

All the cavalry were out scouring the country when, next morning, Henry of Navarre, all booted and spurred, looking as jolly as a sandboy, and as innocent as a new-born babe, walked into the chapel, where Their Majesties were performing their devotions. Very dutifully he went down on his knees; then, rising, he said with a laugh:

"I bring him back for whom you were searching, about whom you were so troubled. It would have been perfectly easy for me to

escape if I had had a mind to; but that I was never really bent on doing. I hope that henceforth you will have no more anxiety on my account. I shall never depart from Your Majesties' side, save at your express command, and I will die under your roof and in your service."

At daybreak on the 3rd February, Navarre went and planted himself in bed with the Duke of Guise, Coligny's murderer, who was not an early riser.

"Cousin, cousin," he cried, plucking him merrily by the beard which ill concealed the great scar he had recently received, "last night the Queen-Mother promised me that she would soon make me Lieutenant-General of the kingdom! Ah, how glad I am! I simply had to come and tell the news to my best friend."

After that, he took the fair-haired Duke to the Saint-Germains Fair, showered caresses on him, and flung his arms about him in full view of the crowd, who gaped in amazement that this young scatterbrain should be so very forgetful of past ills.

Catherine thought, like every one else, that a young man who comes in for a high position of that kind does not play the rebel. All the same she did not take away his guards. . . .

That night he went to pay a visit of courtesy to his wife. Her fingers were straying sadly over her lute, her chamber was heavy with the scent of musk and ambergris.

It had come to this, that poor Margot dared not leave her quarters now. The King had exiled Bussy and imprisoned her beloved Gilonne. But she had had her revenge. She had just compassed the death of his favourite Du Gast.

"Well, Navarre," said she, assuming her most contemptuous air, "when do we start for our kingdom?"

"Madame," he answered ironically, "are you so ill at ease in heaven, that you fain would go to hell?"

"Coward! Coward!" replied her lovely eyes.

This man made her gorge rise. She turned away from him and used her fan. He took the insult calmly, determined not to let her into his secret, for experience had taught him prudence. Mar-

guerite was a Valois and a Medici to boot. And that was saying not a little. . . . In her he put no trust.

With a low and supple bow he bent and kissed that neck which now shone forth again in all its triumphant nudity, sucked the white fingers of the lutanist as though they had been sugar-plums, and, humming a little song, went on his way.

Charlotte pretended she was ailing. He kept her company—like a brother. She too was playing him false. He had known it all along, but he had a passion for her and she was the only thing he longed for when he went away.

Now, on 5th February, the whole Court went hunting the deer in the forest of Senlis. Everything was in readiness for the flight. Horses were waiting on the road to Sedan. It was arranged that Navarre should join forces with Condé, who was to re-enter France at the head of an army of seasoned veterans.

So successful had he been in allaying suspicion, that only two gentlemen were there to keep an eye on him. They were easily disposed of. . . .

But alas, once more someone had played the traitor. D'Aubigné, who had stayed behind in Paris to see that all went according to plan, galloped after him post-haste to Senlis.

"Sire," he said, "the King knows all!"

For a moment Henry swayed in the saddle. Like one in a nightmare he heard d'Aubigné whispering hoarsely in his ear:

"You must make a dash for it now. There's not a moment to lose. The road to death and shame is the road to Paris. All others lead to life and glory."

"We need but one of them," replied Navarre.

As for the two guards, who had suspected nothing, each had a dagger at his throat. Henry spared their lives, but thought it well to take them along with him.

Pursuers were out scouring the Sedan road for the fugitive. To put them off the track, Henry turned westwards, towards Alençon, where he knew he would be safe. But to get there—that was the rub! His pursuers had orders to take and kill him, then and there.

"Fear not," said Henry, "God has work for me to do in France."

Night fell pitch-dark and freezing, the horses slipped and slithered on the ice-bound roads. Then they went astray in some ill-omened wood. Out of it they floundered at last, found the road again, the right one this time, and spurred like mad along it—on, on towards safety. Crouching well down over his horse's mane, Navarre made light of it all with jest and mockery, as was his wont.

"There are two things," he shouted to his companions, "that I shall miss sorely: one is the Mass, the other my wife."

Whereat they laughed and the laughter warmed their hearts. Day broke at last, and yonder through the pallid mist—behold the silver riband of the Oise! Through it they rode, up the farther bank, then on again they spurred their reeking steeds. The morning looked down on the brown plough-lands. Navarre, in high fettle, quaffed the air in mighty draughts. It was the air of freedom. Ah, how many times had he thought he would never taste the sweets of liberty again! Life was going to be a splendid thing!

A country squire, perceiving from afar the troop of horsemen making for his village, rode forth to meet them, to try and prevail on them to take another route. Mistaking one of the King's companions for the leader of the party, he explained why he made his request, which, never drawing rein, they granted him casually, over their shoulders as it were, but on one condition, to wit, that he should serve as their guide as far as Châteauneuf.

As he galloped along with the fugitives he grew garrulous and told them all about the Court, about the times one might have with the ladies there, and how easy were the favours of the princesses themselves. He waxed specially communicative about the scandalous behaviour of the Queen of Navarre, laying on and sparing not. . . .

Arriving at Châteauneuf, which the squire knew full well stood firm for the Bourbons, Henry halloo'd to the Captain of the Guard who was posted on the ramparts.

"Open," he shouted. "Open to your lord and master."

And straightway the captain opened the gates and knelt, with his

arms about the King's knees. Whereupon their escort of the wagging tongue, stricken with a mighty panic, drove spurs into his horses' flanks and galloped away for dear life.

The fugitives laughed long and loud at this incident as they fell to greasing each other's sore posteriors, for the going had been fast and furious. Châteauneuf harboured them but a single night. The next morning found them pressing on again towards Alençon. There, when they arrived, two hundred and fifty gentlemen of the province flung in their lot with Navarre.

On 26th February, Henry crossed the Loire before Saumur, where a Protestant army was awaiting a leader. Safe at last, he heaved a profound sigh of relief.

"Praise be to God who hath delivered me out of the hands of mine enemies. They slew the Queen, my mother. They slew the Admiral and all my trustiest henchmen. Not a whit better was the treatment they had in store for me. Wild horses would not drag me back again."

He was now twenty-three. He had proved his courage in many a battle, and, having served his term in Catherine's school of politics, he was afraid of nothing. He prided himself on his thorough knowledge of the art of dissimulation. . . .

The best of his life lay before him, and he trusted the star which had brought him safely through so many perils.

At last he threw off the mask, went to the "preaching," and proclaimed himself chief of the Huguenots. But there was no hatred in his heart. That was a sentiment that never entered there. He was a tower of strength. One thing, and only one, could make this King commit a folly—a love-glance from a woman's eyes.

PART II

THE MILLER OF BARBASTE

THE King of Navarre was busy hunting, round about his mill at Barbaste. From time to time, the gamekeepers came, bringing to the royal kitchen the meagre products of the chase: two brace of partridges, five rabbits, twelve small birds, a couple of hares.

Fortunately, however, in the vast fireplace, there were a-cooking one hundred and sixty pounds of beef, two hundred and thirteen of mutton and ninety-four of veal, while twenty-six capons and seventy-six fowls were roasting on the spits.

Moreover, generous supplies of sausages, bacon, ox-tripe and sheep's stomachs were heaped up on the tables. Fourteen creations of sweet pastry were attracting the flies. Ranged along the wall, four barrels of wine were ready to assuage the thirst of the huntsmen.

Twenty cooks, assisted by a troop of scullions and sweating kitchen-wenchs, who were making ready this Gargantuan repast, were discussing the love-affairs of the King.

"They won't take long over dinner. His Majesty will be wanting to get back to Nérac as soon as he can, to see the little Tignonville girl."

"You mean the baker's wife at Saint-Jean. Tignonville has had her nose put out of joint."

"I' faith, 'tis my young lady Montagu that queens it to-day."

"Nay, my girl, 'tis the miller's wife at Barbaste, 'tis the Armandine."

"Bah, stale news, blockhead! Everybody knows our Henry's sweet on Catherine du Luc."

"Ah, so he was, *yesterday*. Now it's Goliath's wife he's cuddling and coddling. She told me so in confidence this week that's gone, in the market-place."

"Is she the one that made him lousy?" piped one of the scullions.

"You're a week behind the fair: the trull of the moment is the collier's wife who lives in the wood."

"I tell you *no one's* got the job. The situation's vacant. Last night, when he was at the ball with his suite, they blew out the candles and raped the women and girls. Our Henry's partner was the beautiful Anne de Combefort. She threw herself out of window and broke her neck, more fool she, say I."

"Those are the ways of the Paris Court," said an older woman, with a sigh, "and foul and wicked ways they are."

"Look out! Here he comes. . . ."

A hunter, in a doublet of brown velvet, green breeches and a leathern collar, tossed his brown felt hat to a page, to whom he administered a vigorous pummelling by way of showing his affection. Two locks of hair twined quaintly about his ears. Laughing merrily, he strode into the kitchen, clipped the kitchen wenches round the waist, drank a draught of wine from a bottle, lifted the tops off the saucepans and poked his long nose in to see what was a-cooking there. Then, with a slash of his poniard, he brought down one of the great hams that were hanging from the beams.

A peasant was following in his wake. Henry drained a glass with him and called for his treasurer.

"Our hounds have killed this rascal's cow," he said; "dole him out thirty *livres*."

"Willingly, Sire. But you must give me the money first."

"Man, I haven't a farthing," said Henry.

Then, turning to the nobles who were now trooping into the kitchen, he said:

"Gentlemen, I have need of thirty *livres*. I rely on you to find them."

"Your Majesty is pleased to jest. Why, 'tis months now since we got away with some of the doubloons which the King of Spain sends to the Duke of Guise to keep his League on its feet."

"Suppose Your Majesty put in a claim for the pensions which

the King of France keeps forgetting to pay you," suggested his gentleman-in-waiting.

"My friend," said the King, turning to the luckless peasant, "you see how it is with our purses! Come, dine with us, wait for better times, and meanwhile rest you merry. Sooner or later I will see to it that your loss is made good."

The Court of France, having made peace with the fugitive, appointed him Governor of Guyenne. Furthermore, several towns were granted as places of refuge to the Protestants, half of which, on second thoughts, were taken away again. All this sowed discontent in Gascony. Navarre was all for peace in his realm. He set an example of toleration by attending christenings and marriages, heedless of whether they were Catholic or Protestant. Wherever he went he took with him his gaiety and his spirit of conciliation, and gave out that he knew but one religion: the religion of honest folk.

At first, his melancholy cousin, Condé, had been the better liked, but Condé was dogged by ill-luck. On Henry, however, everything seemed to smile. He was stout-hearted, bold and merry, frank, affable, accessible and easy-going, pleased when the rest were pleased. The only malcontents were the Protestant ministers. They blamed him for his profligate behaviour, and Nérac, the capital of the Duchy of Albret, his mother's fief, where Navarre had taken up his quarters, they dubbed a brothel.

"What am I to do about it?" asked the young man sardonically.

"Sire, prevail on the Queen to join you there. People are too apt to forget that you are brother-in-law to the King of France. There the Queen will hold her Court, what time you go where duty calls. You need that jewel in your crown to make people respect it."

"The Queen serves me better at the Louvre than here, Monsieur."

"Not so, Your Majesty. I pray you, make your peace with her."

Navarre acquiesced. One day, with a face as long as a fiddle, he wrote a letter to Marguerite, who had sent him a missive full of sage advice.

"I pray you let bygones be bygones," he said. "I want to show you how I love you, to prove it to you as I never have before. As soon as things have quieted down here, you will be able to come and join me."

Marguerite was in bad odour at Court. She had been scheming and plotting to help her brother d'Alençon, whose dream it was to see himself King of Flanders. Finding himself again a prisoner in the Louvre, Alençon had managed to escape through his sister's bedroom window, by letting himself down with ropes she had smuggled in, concealed in a lute case.

Often her thoughts turned to Navarre playing the King down there in his little toy-kingdom. "His nose is bigger than his kingdom," was the common saying. All the same, he was King, he was master there. For her, life at the Louvre was becoming starkly impossible. Her Bussy was a philanderer, while Entraguet was forever ruffling it on the Pré-aux-Clercs.

At the time of their marriage, Navarre was just a little nineteen-year-old captain. The strait-laced life he had led in the Protestant camps had not done much towards making a lover of him; but all that was years ago, and, since then, many a woman with signal gifts to charm and console had found her way to his embraces. With such thoughts in mind, she resolved to do his bidding, and work her spell upon him. Secretly, therefore, using her broad notepaper whose margins were adorned with emblems of love, she wrote and told him that he had done ill to leave her without so much as bidding her adieu, that she had both wit and will to serve him, and that he would derive much profit from her friendship.

So well did she plead her cause that Navarre called on the King to let her come to him.

"I gave my sister to a Catholic, not to a Huguenot," was

the King's reply to the messenger. "If my brother-in-law would have his wife return to him, let him become a Catholic again."

But ere long, the Queen-Mother made it clear to her son that Marguerite, who was a scandal to them, and a thorn in their flesh, might be useful as a pledge. The Protestants showed no disposition to give up the towns they had been called on to surrender. Navarre must be offered a tempting bait.

"I will take his Margot to him," said the Queen-Mother, "as if I were making him a precious gift. At the same time I shall hear the grievances of those evil birds the Huguenot deputies, who are going to hold a conference. Thus I shall see what is passing in our provinces."

"But the dowry, Madame, the dowry! He wants the dowry to accompany the wife. And money I have none. . . ."

Those favourites of his, his mignons—that's where the money went. . . . However, by a deed drawn up on a lordly sheet of parchment and sealed with the royal seal, l'Agenois and le Rouergue, the counties of Quercy and Gaure, together with divers other fiefs, were conveyed to Marguerite. That was not a dowry to be despised.

THE QUEENS TAKE A JOURNEY

DRAWN by six mules, with bells jingling unceasingly on their harness, the coach conveying Catherine de' Medici swayed and lurched along the rough and shadeless roads, beneath the full glare of a pitiless August sun.

A long cortège, consisting of those fair inseparables, her famous "flying squad"; of officers; of noble gentlemen; of astrologers, wound its imposing way across the country.

Behind it, far enough off to keep clear of the dust, followed Marguerite's litter, its velvet hangings adorned with all manner of gallant devices, and emblazoned with her emblem, the sun. On and on it went, rolling like a ship at sea, through fields of red-gold wheat; while, in its wake, there came yet another procession—more fair ladies, more officers, more gentlemen, and a swarm of poets, musicians and perfumers.

The people gathered in crowds to see the Queens go by; men, for the most part, attracted by the ladies of the Court. These coach-loads of pretty girls set all Gascony topsy-turvy. But Marguerite was a stronger lure, and set more hearts on fire, than all the rest of the women put together.

Her magnificent attire, her perfumes, her jewels, her learning—she replied in Latin to the speechifiers—won all hearts.

The Queen-Mother, looking mightily majestic and imposing, stopped from time to time to administer justice, or to lend her patronage to a local fête. The bells through all the countryside went ringing merrily; the grasshoppers chirped their loudest. The keys of the various towns were brought to her on richly brodered cushions. Frequently, despite her gout, despite attacks of colic, she quitted her comfortable conveyance and mounted horseback. Fifty-seven! She set the years at defiance! What cared she for time?

Navarre, it seemed, was playing hide-and-seek with the Queens. No one as yet had caught a glimpse of him. They looked for him at Bordeaux, where there was much merry-making in their honour. But time was when Bordeaux had slammed its gates in his face. He was anything but a favourite there. He knew his Catherine and, suspicious of a trap, declined the invitation.

A month went by. The messengers grew all skin and bone, for ever scouring to and fro along the Nérac-Bordeaux road. Catherine exhorted Charlotte de Sauves, whom she had brought with her, to make the best use of her charms. A queer way, in truth, of setting her daughter's conjugal affairs to rights!

Henry, his tongue in his cheek, kept suggesting different places for the meeting, now here, now there, taking an impish delight in keeping his mother-in-law on the run.

At last he fixed on a lone house on the Castéras road, where ambush was impossible, and to that house he suffered none but the Queens and their ladies to be admitted.

He kept them waiting a while, and then dashed in upon them, his face all beaming, and fifty good men and true, armed at point, to bear him company. He bowed rather coolly to his wife. Of Charlotte de Sauves, who made her tenderest sheep's eyes at him, he took not the slightest notice. Alas, when love is dead . . .

Catherine, seeing how the land lay, became more affable than ever.

The first effusive greetings over, the tears of joy all wiped away (Catherine and Navarre, who copied her, wept whenever they wanted to), they bowled along towards La Réole, the Queen-Mother folding her son-in-law lovingly in her arms.

"*Figlio mio*," she whispered, smothering him with caresses that made his flesh creep, "the King is all for peace. His love goes out to you, not only as his brother-in-law, but as being, after his brother, the next heir to the throne."

"Ah, Madame, you let me breathe again!" cried Henry, pretending to be carried away with joy, and showering kisses on her still lovely hand.

"Speak your mind freely to me, my son," she said. "I mean exceeding well towards you."

How it pleased him to hear once more the artful intonation that he knew so well. Here, in this country, where he was safe, he found the game immensely to his taste.

They reached La Réole, a Protestant town of refuge, but still Catherine had not yet probed her son-in-law's designs.

With every mark of respect, he escorted the Queen-Mother to her quarters. Then he proposed that he should take Margot to a house that had been made ready for them across the way. But . . . the day had been hot, the horsemen, who had been in the saddle since daybreak, had sweated copiously under their buff jerkins. She advised him to go away and have a bath.

For this hard-bitten young man, with his hair *à la Huguenote*, the dainty little Queen felt all her old repulsion returning. Navarre bit his lip and went and consoled himself with a turn at the dice-board.

Next day he promptly made up his mind that he would not ride with the royal cortège. He went a-hunting, scoured the country left and right, put in an appearance, now and again, to pay his respects to the ladies, who were getting frankly bored, sent them some game, some bouquets and little missives full of good humour.

Catherine grew tired, and would fain have come to a halt at l'Isle-Jourdain, there to hold her long-intended meeting with the Huguenot deputies; but Navarre deemed it too far away from Nérac. He suggested Pamiers; but that didn't suit the Queen-Mother. The next thing was, Navarre fell sick. Then Marguerite followed suit. At last everybody got fit and well again, and Auch was the place that was fixed on for the meeting.

Catherine was the first to arrive. Navarre kept her waiting two whole days. However, nothing ruffled the wily Florentine; she re-read her Machiavelli and cudgelled her brains with plans to set every one by the ears.

At Auch, Navarre ran a critical eye over his wife. Life in the Louvre, with nothing to do, had made her fat, turned her into a

little dumpling. He found her to his taste, and told her so. . . . Without zest, animated solely by motives of practical policy, both with their eyes on the indispensable heir, they spent the night together. . . .

Next day, by way of celebrating their reconciliation, the fiddlers were sent for, and there was dancing and merry-making, while Catherine lingered long at the pigeon-shooting.

Right in the middle of a Spanish *pavane*, Navarre's own valet-de-chambre, hastily clearing a passage for himself through the crowd of dancers, came and whispered in his master's ear:

"Sire, the Catholics have just robbed you of La Réole."

Henry of Navarre let go the hand of his wife, who stood by dumbfounded, and, bowing low, quitted her with a smile.

Always the same old tale of treachery! But treachery put his mind at rest. The kisses and caresses of the two women caused him a more profound misgiving. Treason and duplicity were their proper element. Now he knew them again! Bent on giving them a Roland for their Oliver, he made a sign to some of his trusty companions. They hastened from the ball-room, slipped on their breastplates, leapt on their horses and plunged into the night, hurrying off with their tidings to the lodgings of the other Protestant cavaliers.

"Let those who love me and would win renown, follow whither I lead!" Navarre cried out.

The troop, riding hard a-gallop, ran full tilt into Catherine and her retinue returning from her pigeon-shooting.

"Madame," flung the King at her, as he rode with head well down over the shoulders of his foaming horse, "we had hoped your coming would allay our troubles, but, far from that, you do but kindle them anew."

Without awaiting her reply, they drove the spurs into their horses and galloped to the nearest Catholic town. It was Fleurance, and it was full late when they arrived. The gates were shut. They broke them down, made their way inside, and called for the leading citizens who, after some delay, were brought to them. Then,

leaving a guard in the conquered town, back they rode to Auch. The dance was still in progress. The King gave orders for another *pavane*, and danced it with Marguerite, who was frightened by his sneering raillery.

Catherine sat enthroned on a royal seat covered with purple velvet, richly embroidered with golden fleurs-de-lys. He saluted her with a gallant bow and told her he had just taken Fleurance. Compared with La Réole, it was a petty town enough.

With a sly look in her eye, Catherine made answer:

"One cabbage for another, good, my son; but mine is the better grown."

After this, Navarre, not feeling very safe at Auch, decided that the conference should be held at Nérac, or not at all. It was now Catherine's turn to feel alarmed. "Is it a prudent thing to do," she said to herself, "to go and put oneself in the power of this wily fox, Navarre?"

But Catherine knew no fear. She kept about her person one of her maids-of-honour, named Dayelle, with whom Navarre had just fallen in love.

To please his innamorata, he was now to be seen sporting doublets of black-and-white silk or satin, yellow satin breeches, shirts and drawers of Dutch linen, silken stockings, velvet hats and mantles of purple, adorned with gold and silver lace. Furthermore, at Dayelle's urgent bidding, he suffered his mother-in-law to cut off a lock of his hair, as a token of submission.

AT THE COURT OF NAVARRE

MARGUERITE, mounted on a white palfrey, made a triumphal entry into Nérac, side by side with her husband.

A complimentary address in Latin was recited to her, a second in French, and a third in the Gascon tongue. In all three languages the hope was expressed that she would have an heir. . . .

An heir! Alas, there was no denying it, they felt an unconquerable repugnance for one another. Margot, versed in all the subtleties of vice, her flesh steeped in unguents, unhealthy as the flesh of the Valois always was, had no attraction for Navarre. He liked his meat ungarnished.

And Margot—it made her sick to have to take this sweaty, dusty hunter of game to her embraces. She had her sheets changed whenever they passed a quarter of an hour together.

The next day, a second bed was put up in the conjugal chamber, and Navarre went back to Dayelle.

The Protestant deputies hung about doing nothing. The King of Navarre, who stayed up till two in the morning with his mistress, did not leave his bed till ten o'clock. In the afternoon, they tilted at rings, or else Catherine had her medicine to take. The deputies grew impatient. Catherine sent for them separately, and, exciting their mutual jealousy, did her best to sow dissension among them. And, failing at that, she threatened them with the gallows.

At last the conference began. The Protestants demanded fifty-nine places of safety where they might sing their psalms in peace. The Queen-Mother granted them fourteen, and ordered her coach.

For three months she lavished soft words and promises on her son-in-law, to get him to return to Court. Too cunning to refuse, too cautious to give way, the subtle Henry answered neither yea

nor nay. She returned to the charge when the time arrived to say farewell.

"Will you suffer Guise to possess himself of the kingdom? The King is delicate and has no heir. Alençon is ever busy with his plots. Your presence would be a buttress to the royal power. Think it out, my son."

At last she departed.

The hillsides were a mass of blossom. The spring was in her blood; she felt a girl again and rode on horseback. Next evening, ten leagues distant from her starting-point, a cloud of dust was seen behind them on the road. There were horsemen, riding hard.

"What means that?" asked Catherine anxiously.

"'Tis Your Majesty's son-in-law," they answered.

"Ah, *Dio mio*, the bandit means to get me in his power!" she cried, unsheathing the little dagger she never went without.

"That cannot be, Madame, since only two men bear him company."

"Ah, good my mother, I had not sufficiently assured you of the love I bear you," sighed Navarre as he bent over her hand and kissed it.

For a space she was mistrustful, though he spoke her softly and promised all she asked. Then, knowing how greatly he valued his remaining lock of hair, for it was a sign among the Huguenots, she said:

"Wilt sacrifice that lock for me?"

Kneeling before her, he answered:

"Cut it off yourself, Madame."

And Catherine resumed her journey, never dreaming that it was Dayelle, whom she was taking back with her, who had procured her these supplementary and touching attentions.

Marguerite had shed bitter tears when she came to bid her mother farewell. Going to Gascony had been a sad reverse for her. She was the dream of every living man—except her husband. Doomed to perpetual disappointment, she searched among those

barbarous Huguenots for someone to console her, and she searched in vain.

Navarre, who hardly ever spoke to her, took her to Pau, the capital of his Béarn and the stronghold of Calvinist fanaticism. It was worse than a prison. The arrival of the Catholic Queen, all painted and powdered, was the signal for a general revolt.

To make matters worse for Marguerite, Navarre fell in love with Mademoiselle de Rebours, her lady-in-waiting, who was constantly wounding her with her ill-natured hints and innuendoes.

In view of the enmity of the Béarnais, they decided to return to Nérac, where they definitely established their Court.

On their way thither, at Eauze, Navarre was laid low with an attack of brain-fever. Marguerite was terrified lest he should die. What would her terrible brother do with her then? She therefore nursed him with a devotion which made him loud in her praises. For a whole fortnight she never doffed her dress, with its great sleeves of cloth-of-silver trimmed with lynx.

Nevertheless, although he praised her assiduity, it was with an anxious mind that he swallowed the broth and the physic that she prepared for him with her incomparable hands.

Another of her maids-of-honour, a little girl of fourteen, Mademoiselle de Montmorency-Fosseux, whom people called Fosseuse, assisted her in her task as sick-nurse.

When he was beginning to recover and was still very weak, the King was struck with this child and her simple, artless expression. Mademoiselle de Rebours had fallen sick in her turn, and had stayed behind at Pau. He liked to take the child on his knee and make much of her, calling her his wench, though her breasts had scarcely begun to form. He thought that one so young might still have a pure heart . . . And purity, sincerity, was what he longed for.

When he regained his health, and, with it, his voracious appetite, he took his fill elsewhere. The wife of Constan, the lawyer, supplied him with all he needed.

Under Marguerite's regime, the Court of the King of Navarre blossomed forth bravely. The little Queen paraded and preened herself before the rustic boors, filling them with wonder and admiration. A gentleman of the Court grew mad with love for her. And she made cruel fun of him.

"What would you do to prove your love for me?" she asked of him one day.

"Do? There is nothing I would not do," murmured the love-lorn wretch.

"Would you take poison?"

"Ay, did you but give me leave to die at your feet," he answered.

"That will I," said she. "This very night."

She mixed him a goodly draught, strong enough to purge a cart-horse, and locked him up in a room by himself, giving him her word that she would come before the poison took effect. She left him there two hours, during which the purgative did its work so thoroughly that the hapless swain was completely unapproachable. The heartless and Rabelaisian Queen brought all her ladies to see the pretty sight. . . .

She smartened up the Gascon lords, showed them how to dress themselves, taught them dancing, singing, wooing, how to fight for their lady-love, and not merely for religion. She taught them how to eat and drink with delicacy. Her table was famed for its luxury. Special couriers galloped to Nérac with snow from the summits of the Pyrenees.

She took Italian comedians into her pay, and founded an academy. Religious feuds, ambitious rivalries were laid aside, and by the banks of the softly flowing Baise, love and dalliance were the only themes of conversation.

And in this atmosphere of *dolce far niente* "Idlesse breeds vices, even as the sun breeds snakes."

The King learned to make plentiful use of the bath and scented waters, though, according to his wife, he could never banish those unfortunate exhalations of the skin which used to turn her stomach.

The *ménage* got along as best it could. Henry told the Queen all about his love-affairs and made her presents of jewellery and aigrettes, which, however, he soon asked her to give him back again in order to ransom his beloved squire, the redoubtable d'Aubigné, who had recently been made prisoner by the Catholics.

In the perfumed alleys of that tree-fringed river-bank, Marguerite wandered in sweet converse with her lover, the elegant Turenne; whilst Navarre, amid beds of blowing flowers, pursued Fleurette the garden maid, with all the ardour of a young man's love. Henry III, who was kept informed of all that went on behind the scenes at the Court of Nérac, denounced the love-affairs of Margot and Turenne to his brother-in-law, who, in truth, did not need to be told.

The King of France entertained a mortal hatred of his sister, whose former lover, Entraguet, had just slain his two most cherished mistresses, Caylus and Maugiron, in a duel.

He wept long and bitterly over their white bodies, embraced them with passionate grief, cut off their hair that he might carry it with him wherever he went, gave orders that they should be buried in royal state in the Church of Saint Paul, and that statues of marble should adorn their tombs.

Henry had to send Turenne away. Marguerite was furious. She had her revenge.

She pretended to get letters from the Paris Court, giving details of all the scornful things the King of France had said about Navarre, telling, too, how the Duke of Guise had laughed at him in front of Charlotte de Sauves, and said that Navarre was a very trumpery little warrior indeed, poltroon enough to content himself with other people's leavings, instead of taking a portion for himself.

"My brother only brings those charges against me so as to cheat me of the cities of my dowry. He sets high store by Cahors, because it is the key to the south." So said Marguerite, over and over again.

Navarre shrugged his shoulders. Marguerite made Fosseuse

speak, and Fosseuse, duly prompted, sang the same tune. Could such an angel tell a lie? The lover, drinking these things from her mouth, deemed he was drinking from the well of Truth itself.

One night, unheeding the prudent counsel of his advisers, he flung himself on Cahors with some two thousand men, fought five days and five nights without a break, and at last took the city by assault.

When he returned to Nérac, fired with love for the little girl, he was in tatters, stained with gore and begrimed with powder, more like a brigand-chief than a prince of the blood.

It seemed as though the whole country would again be plunged into the horrors of a civil war. Full of anxiety, the Queen-Mother sent Alençon to parley with Navarre.

That poor, sickly, muddy-mettled creature, with his eternal hacking cough, was more grubby, more spotty, more hideous than ever, but in his retinue came the handsome, exquisite Champvallon. Marguerite, whose heart was fancy-free, was straightway carried off her feet.

Alençon did not take note of this affair without a pang of jealousy. To console himself he laid siege to Fosseuse. It was now Navarre's turn to be jealous.

Hitherto he had treated her as a little, innocent plaything. But now, to cure him of his jealousy and to prove that she loved but him alone, Fosseuse surrendered herself completely. In sullen rage Alençon departed, taking the dainty Champvallon along with him, and the Queen shut herself up to nurse her grief in solitude.

Meantime Fosseuse found herself with child. Proud of her superiority over the barren Queen, seeing herself already the mother of a son, and dreaming of the Crown, she spoke without reserve to Navarre, who was desperately in love with her.

She took it into her head that she would like to stay at Eaux-Chaudes, and asked that the Queen herself should bear her company. Marguerite declined the invitation. In a towering rage, Navarre took his mistress to the waters himself, together with two maids-of-honour. La Rebours, left high and dry, wrote daily to

Marguerite telling her that Fosseuse was setting up her husband against her, and had hopes of slipping into her shoes.

Thus it began to be borne in upon the little Queen that the Louvre, as a place of residence, had advantages which this rustic and dangerous Court did not possess.

"Darling," whispered Navarre, bending over his sleeping wife, "wake up!"

"What is the matter?"

By the red light that filtered through the curtains she could see the King's panic-stricken visage.

"Darling, be a kind soul and get up at once and see to this girl of mine. She is very ill. I know that, seeing her like that, you won't refer to what is past. You know how fond I am of her. Please, please do this for me."

"I hold you too much in honour ever to be offended with what proceeds from you. I will go to Fosseuse and you may rest assured that I will treat her as if she was my own daughter."

Quite overcome, he kissed her hand. What a wealth of things he forgave her at that moment!

Staying not to take off her night-cap—it was of orange velvet—she hurried away to Fosseuse who, some hours later, brought an infant girl into the world. It was dead.

As soon as the danger was over, Marguerite left the little paramour sobbing in her bed, and came back full of joy over this still-born babe.

But Fosseuse kept asking for the Queen to come back again, and Navarre came to implore her to return.

"I went to her when she needed me," was her reply. "But now she doesn't need me any more, and I—want to go to sleep."

"I say you *shall* go, do you hear? I love her, and therefore you should love her. Get up! You've slept long enough."

"Is this the reward of my indulgence? It is a shame to treat me thus, me, your wife and the sister of your King!"

Ah, what a difficult thing life is! As if all this were not enough,

the plague broke out, carrying off all that the ceaseless wars had spared. Against that enemy the doctors had no specific save this precept:

"Go quickly, go far, and come back late."

Catherine, alarmed at Navarre's increasing influence, sent word to her daughter to bring him to Paris, to the Court, without fail.

Marguerite sent off a messenger to Champvallon. The thought of him set her on fire.

"Sun of my soul, my dearest heart, my all, my own beloved Narcissus, I am coming."

She dragged Fosseuse along with her, deeming that Navarre would certainly follow that attractive bait.

He did in fact accompany them, well on into Poitou, where the Queen-Mother came to meet them. He was all courtesy, and promised to go to the Louvre. Not at the moment, however, because he had business to attend to. And off he went again, alert, gay and daring, with a song on his lips, by no means sorry to part with Fosseuse, of whom he was already tired. His youthful appetite was too strong to be content with such green fruit.

ON THE JARNAC ROAD

PALE beneath his paint and powder, Henry III, in a furious passion, strode up to his sister, who was dancing. He could hardly speak for rage. Mounted on a pair of high-heeled shoes, she dominated him and looked him up and down with an insolent air.

The fiddlers fiddled the louder, doing their best to minimise the effect of the scandalous scene. But, above their music, you could hear the names of Marguerite's lovers which her brother was flinging in her face. She retorted with the names of his mignons.

"I won't have you here another day. To-morrow morning you leave the Court."

The courtiers melted away, scared by this terrible outburst of fury. Guise, looking quite undisturbed, led Marguerite, verging on collapse, from the room.

On reaching Paris, she found Champvallon married. He had come back to her, but she owed him a grudge for his little matrimonial escapade.

Catherine had given her daughter leave to take lodgings for herself outside the Louvre, in a private house. Finding herself thus unfettered, Marguerite made an unbecoming use of her freedom. Before long it was rumoured that she was in the family way. Away down in his Gascon home, Navarre gaped with amazement, and then burst out a-laughing.

These goings on and, more particularly, the things she said, for she could not resist the temptation to display her wit at her brother's expense, aroused the dormant animosity of the King and Catherine to renewed activity.

It was given out, where she was, that Henry III lived in a secret apartment, away from every one, with his mignons, who slept in little cells built round a vast room. Every night he picked out one of them to share his bed.

The King thought the Huguenot pamphleteers were going a little far when they spoke of him as the haunter of stews and the worthless King of France.

The only reason that had led him to consent to his sister's return was that he hoped she would bring back Navarre. Since she had failed in her mission and was too much occupied with her profligate activities to give it a thought, he would send her packing again.

With the morning Marguerite, shedding tears of rage, had willy-nilly to be on the road. A messenger preceded her, a messenger with a letter for Navarre, in which the King informed his brother-in-law that he was sending his wife back to him because she had been guilty of gross misbehaviour in Paris.

The walls of the capital had scarcely disappeared from view behind the Queen of Navarre, when she was overtaken by a Captain of the Guard, who searched her litter and even took off her mask to make sure that it was really she who was departing and that no lover was accompanying her. After that he withdrew, depriving her of two of her ladies-in-waiting, the two she loved the best, and a few of her serving-men.

She was hoping that Champvallon would join her, help her to bear her humiliation, and beguile the tedium of the journey. But this was not to be. She had to plough her lonely furrow, with none to bear her company. At Jarnac, her husband, through the uncouth lips of a Huguenot, commanded her to stay where she was till she received his permission to proceed.

Before taking his wife back, Henry wanted to hear what she had to say concerning this barefaced outrage which the whole of Europe was talking about. Henry III now changed his tune, saying that his sister's honour was unsullied, that the whole thing was a tissue of calumny and slander, originating with some gossip-mongering women among her entourage.

"You know that the most virtuous of princesses, and even your own mother, the late Queen of Navarre, have not escaped such calumny."

"Od's life!" cried Navarre, as he ran his eyes down this strange missive, "'tis a signal honour the King does me! He calls me a cuckold and a whoreson!"

It took the intervention of some skilled diplomats to settle the business. Navarre stuck out for better terms, demanded more towns, and insisted that the Catholic troops should be withdrawn from his territory. The negotiations dragged on for eight long months, during which time Marguerite had ample leisure to feel the stings of her humiliation. Her dresses made a great sensation in the little town; her boxes of unguents, of alum, of cosmetics, white and red, were objects of irreverent curiosity. And, worst of all, Birague, her mother's old accomplice, gave her no rest, and followed her about everywhere.

At length Navarre consented to receive his dishonoured spouse. She was the first to arrive at the meeting-place. Without a word, the King embraced her in the sight of all. Then they went apart together for half an hour.

"Well, Madame," said he, "do you now share the feelings of Timon? Are you going to cultivate a taste for agriculture?" Some time ago she had chaffed him because he would insist on planting the trees and flowering plants that he adored.

"Good my lord, my husband and my friend, it fills me with joy to see you once again," she said in all humility.

She mounted her litter. He followed behind, on horseback. That night at Nérac, during dinner, the King, merry as was his wont, joined in the jesting talk of his gentlemen-in-waiting. At his side, the Queen, to whom none spoke a word, fell a-weeping. With her reddened eyes and quivering lips, she was a piteous sight to see. To conceal their growing constraint, the King and his lords fell to talking louder and louder, and the jesting grew more hilarious than ever.

At last, Marguerite rose and withdrew to her bedchamber, whither her husband did not follow her.

CORISANDE

MARGUERITE stood at the mullioned window, watching the Comtesse de Guiche go by on her way to Mass, accompanied by her little girl, her clown, a Blackamoor, a Basque in a robe of green, a monkey, an English page, a poodle and a lackey, a suite which detracted nothing from her high distinction.

"What a set-out, what a retinue for a King's most cherished mistress!" exclaimed the Queen of Navarre, with a sneer. "And what a sight she is with her little nose, her big forehead and her spidery legs."

Howbeit, she was her most dangerous rival, a woman to the core, high-spirited, sensitive, unselfish, an equal.

What philtre had this dainty charmer given him to drink? For the fact was, Navarre now saw everything through her eyes, and talked of no one else.

Marguerite turned pale as she remembered that the Council of the King, her husband, was debating whether or not the adulterous Queen should die. . . . And that she had come to this dire pass, she probably owed to the kind offices of this same Comtesse de Guiche. Ah, it was not the little Fosseuse she had to deal with now, that rebellious little chit, but not very formidable rival, whom Catherine, never forgiving her her child, still-born though it was, had ignominiously packed off to her parents.

As for Marguerite and her rival, they indulged in mutual accusations of poisoning. Navarre, who had just discovered a deadly dose in his plate, inclined to the belief that his wife was the culprit. Had not every one of these Medicis got their own special poison!

The little Queen felt the ground giving way beneath her. Her brother Alençon, treachery and inconstancy incarnate, but her one and only friend, was at his last gasp, spitting quantities of blood as Charles IX had done before him. It was the end of all things. . . .

Marguerite, with none to befriend her, encompassed about by foes, was racking her brains to think whom else she could betray to save her skin.

Navarre, forsaken by his wife and Fosseuse, consoled himself first with a widow, Mme d'Allons, and then with a councillor's wife, both persons of experience. A few other mature dames of opulent charms had followed in their wake. He had had enough, for the time, of the sharp, green fruit. The lusciousness of the riper sort was now more to his taste, and there he sought—and found—the sweets of oblivion.

To his long nose, quick to scent out the wherewithal to gratify his sensual appetites, those warm, caressing odours were borne upon the gale. A woman's natural savour was what he liked. He cared not a jot for the perfumes artificially concocted in an expert's beauty-parlour.

But all this was but a wisp of burning flax; a brief flame soon extinguished. His heart was never engaged. Never had any woman loved him. They saw in him someone who could make a queen of them, or else they had been paid, first to seduce, and then to betray him. As for the rest, well, a few crown-pieces sufficed to bring them to his bed.

But who was there to love him for himself? Who would soothe him and make much of him, as a real mistress should? In whose arms was this ardent young King, who longed with all his heart for one sincere caress—in whose arms was he to lay his head, with the certainty that he was truly loved?

When he went to preside over the parliament at Pau, Marguerite having departed, he saw again one who had been his playmate in the days of his childhood. This was Diane d'Andouins, known as Corisande, the widow of Philibert de Gramont, Comte de Guiche, to whom she had borne two children. Her expressive eyes, the shade of thoughtfulness that brooded on her delicate features, the wondrous whiteness of her skin, her lofty intellectual endowments, deeply impressed him.

What mysterious magic is it that sometimes lays a touch on faces that we know quite well, faces that hitherto have moved us not, so that, suddenly, they become more essential to us than bread or water?

A single glance passed between them and behold, they were in the toils. Lovelier women had been his. Her hair had a metallic sheen upon it; her eyes, though sweet and ardent, were small, her legs were as long as the legs of Diana, her huntress namesake, her figure was too athletic to be wholly to his taste. No, Corisande, with her thirty-one years, was by no means his ideal. And yet to be with her was heaven!

Alençon died. Henry III, without issue and without the hope of having any, declared Navarre heir to the throne, conditionally upon his becoming a Catholic and joining hands with him.

Navarre pondered the matter long and deeply. If he abjured, he would lose the Huguenots without winning over the Catholics, for they would still adhere to the Duke of Guise who, with his League, generously supported by Spain, was then more powerful than the King himself. No: to go back to the Louvre would be to sign his own death warrant. He therefore made answer that he could not incur the charge of perfidy and inconstancy for the chance of winning a crown.

Guise, in order to cut him off for ever from the succession, demanded his excommunication. At the same time, liberty of conscience was once again suppressed. Not daring to offer any resistance, Henry III weakly signed everything that the terrible duke put before him.

Thus was a precarious peace followed by a fresh outbreak of civil war. The Catholic troops were already crossing the Garonne. The Protestants held their prayer meetings in secret in the heart of the woods. The dogs, gorged with human blood, were once more to become wolves.

And now, as Navarre suffered his thoughts to linger on these terrible events, his dread of the disasters which threatened to en-

gulf his party, so few, so destitute of funds, became so acute that one half of his moustache went white in consequence.

But outwardly he was as gay and light-hearted as ever. His gaiety was his only asset, his sole means to victory. The day the Bull of excommunication was published, he caused an ironic protest to be stuck up in Rome on the very doors of the Pontifical Palace. This act of defiance set all the Huguenots a-laughing and put them in good fettle again.

To be excommunicated was to be looked on as a social outcast, to be treated as a leper. While this gave pause to people of moderate views who, won over by Navarre's brave and merry disposition, had hitherto been only too ready to take the field with him against the bloodthirsty desperadoes of the League, it incited the more fanatical of his foes to deeds of violence, and twice an attempt was made upon his life.

Sometimes, despite his invincible optimism, Navarre felt a chill run through his marrow. Then he would sit him down and dash off a letter to the Beloved.

"A little while and I shall be hurrying away to you, to gobble up your little hands with kisses. All hail, my Queen! Love your Petiot as he loves you, heart of my heart."

Marguerite's pride as a woman and a queen had been too cruelly wounded. Moreover, she was afraid of dying, and her religious scruples, which had been quite at home with vice, violence and deceit, drew the line at making common cause with an outlaw of the Church.

With never a word to anybody, she barricaded herself in Agen with twenty companies of foot, declared war on her husband, flung herself into the League, and sought help from Guise, who sent her a gentleman of Auvergne named Lignerac, with a few men-at-arms.

She built her a stronghold while waiting for the money she was raising from the King of Spain, intent on turning Agen into a little

kingdom of her own. But this spelt rebellion against the King, who was ravening like a wolf between Guise and Navarre. Before very long, Navarre and the King both set to work to besiege her, each on his own account.

She snapped her fingers at the pair of them, terribly busy giving orders, seeing to her building operations, organising a *Cour galante* and frolicking with one of her ladies-in-waiting, Madame de Duras. She wore boy's clothes, sported a bonnet *à la Guelfe*, so that none should know her for man or maid, and set all her garrison afire.

"Ah!" grumbled Catherine, "God cursed me with this child as a punishment for my sins!"

Navarre was scouring the country in search of men. The ex-communication by this time had been posted on the door of every church and monastery in Guyenne. At first the King and his knights broke down the doors, then, as there were so many of them, they contented themselves with ripping up the notices at the sword's point. But after a few days they grew weary even of this, and rode on without drawing rein or so much as giving the things a glance. Corisande was a Catholic. Would she, too, cast him off? Would she, too, turn away from her poor, unfortunate little Petiot?

Their letters were intercepted. He knew naught of how she was faring in his château at Pau. A desperate longing to see her, to make sure that she still loved him, seized him so that he could not throw it off. But how was he to get through the enemy's lines? He laughed danger to scorn, for at this time he did not set his life at a pin's fee. Fortunately for him, his trusty companions kept a vigilant eye on him.

The spring came in so bland and warm that you would have thought that the very breastplates would melt like ice, the arquebuses bring forth flowers and the soldiers sport in the grassy dells with the apple-cheeked damsels.

Navarre, between one skirmish and the next, picked up all the aigrette plumes, lute-strings, parakeets and ambling steeds that he could find, in the hope, ere long, of lavishing them on his mistress.

THE GAY QUEEN

THE pangs of hunger and the ravages of the plague drove the inhabitants of Agen to desperation. Refusing point-blank to pay the taxes which Marguerite took it upon herself to exact from them, they opened their gates to the besiegers. In dire alarm, the Queen took refuge in the citadel, but the citadel, crammed full of powder, blew up. Amid the shrieks which rent the darkness, Marguerite stood helpless, trembling with terror.

A man on horseback reined in his steed beside her. It was Aubiac, her squire.

"We must fly," she said in an agonised voice, "and on the instant."

Aubiac bowed his assent. "I am at Your Majesty's orders," said he, "but how"—and with a wave of his hand he indicated the country round swarming with hostile troops, the citadel a smoking ruin, the sky-line lurid with burning buildings—"how is it to be done?"

"That I know not, but save me, save me," she cried, amid the uproar, wringing her chubby hands.

He looked at her in silence. She was half-naked, green with terror, looking anything but lovely with her paint and powder wet with tears running in streaks down her cheeks—anything but lovely, yet very desirable. Picking her up in his strong arms, he flung her on his horse, sprang up in front of her, crying:

"Hold on tight to me, Madame." He drove his spurs into his horse's flanks, and they leapt forward.

None of the enemy ever suspected that this poor wretch, fleeing for her life, could be the hated Queen. She got through. The lurid glare of blazing villages lit up the gruesome fruit that dangled from the branches of the trees. Horror-stricken at the sight, Marguerite clung more desperately than ever to Aubiac's broad back.

Suddenly a convent, symbol of peace amid its tranquil woods, dawned upon their view. Would she seek sanctuary there? "Nay," said the reckless Queen, "death rather than that!"

On and on they rode. Suddenly the sound of galloping horses behind them broke upon their ears. Horsemen were riding in hot pursuit. Marguerite cast a terrified look behind, shut her eyes, and felt as if she were going to swoon. Her blonde-tressed wig fell to the ground.

"Madame, Madame, hold me tight," gasped Aubiac.

The horsemen came up with them; it was Lignerac and his men, they too fleeing from the burning town. He restored her wig to the Queen, and then headed her in the direction of the fortress of Carlat, of which his brother Marze was governor. It was a far cry from Agen, among the mountains of Cantal. Lignerac took the Queen up behind him. Five days they journeyed thus, through a land infested with plunderers. Half-mad with terror, Marguerite clung desperately to the horseman's sturdy back. At the various halting-places, Aubiac helped her to dismount, gave her to drink and washed her face.

When one evening the walls of Carlat were seen dark against the skyline, she heaved a deep sigh of relief and gave way at last.

"Pick up . . . carry me," she murmured in swooning tones.

When the drawbridge was raised behind her, she had unguents applied to her limbs, so chafed and sore were they after her long ride.

Greedily Lignerac and his brother Marze rubbed their hands together. She was their prisoner, and they would yield her to the highest bidder, be it her husband, her brother or the Duke of Guise.

The Queen was worn out with all she had been through. Fever laid her low. Hardly was she convalescent when she took for her lover the son of her apothecary, he who compounded her clysters and sometimes administered them.

For several weeks on end, life was a bed of roses for her and her stripling lover. Then, one morning, as he lay within her arms,

Lignerac made his way into the room and ran him through the body.

It never occurred to her to shed a tear. She knew that she was a prisoner, and felt the hour was drawing nigh when she would be put up for sale. And to whom would they sell her? She stood in equal dread of her mother, husband and brother. As for Guise, now that she could no longer be of service to him, he washed his hands of her.

But there was still Aubiac. Silent, but with eyes that spoke volumes, he wandered, like a soul in torment, to and fro along the sombre corridors. She called him to her, gave herself to him, made him mad, and bade him get her out of Carlat. But things did not move quickly enough for her. With terror gnawing at her vitals she contrived to possess herself of some poison and gave some of it to Marze, who was in command of the garrison.

Lignerac hurried to the scene; just as, dagger in hand, he was about to avenge his brother, weakness overcame him. He fell into the Queen's bed, and was lost to the world. She took advantage thereof to resume her flight, yet once again mounted on Aubiac's crupper. Feeling their way by night along the precipitous mountain passes of Auvergne, they reached Ibois and were immediately taken prisoner. Lignerac had denounced them. Tearing Aubiac away from the little Queen, they flung her, a prisoner, into the most impregnable fortress in France: Usson.

A letter from Catherine had gone before her. Fierce as a raging tigress, the Queen-Mother gave orders that Aubiac should be hanged before Marguerite's own eyes. Then, reflecting that that would be to proclaim her adultery from the house-tops, Henry III and she countermanded the orders, and her daughter's lover was hung up head downwards from a tree at the side of a lonely road.

In the damp and gloomy fortress, filled with the terrible exhalations from the dungeons, and from the wells carpeted with scythes into which the condemned were flung; haunted by the wailing ghosts of murdered victims, Marguerite, in an agony of terror, expected every moment would be her last.

But soon, since the headsman came not to seize her, she began to regain a little of her courage—enough, in fact, to try her blandishments on her elderly gaoler. She succeeded in winning him by her usual means, after which he departed, leaving her free, with some of her men about her, mistress of this eagles' nest, well guarded and impregnable, beyond the reach of her mother, her brother and her husband.

Thereupon she sold what jewels she still possessed, collected together a library for her use, wrote her memoirs, corresponded with the poets and trained little choristers for her chapel.

In this way whole years went by. She began to put on weight living this sequestered life. As she could not go out without risk, she bought some camels and rode about on their backs inside the ramparts. She waxed devout, and greedy, drank hard, and sent forth for peasant lads, well-favoured or plain of feature, it mattered not, so they were but twenty years of age. And so, amid these rugged mountains she organised a harem to which fresh recruits were constantly arriving.

She still kept her mania for embalming the hearts of the lovers who had died in her service. Her hoops, on which these relics dangled, grew larger and larger, and could scarcely get through the doorway.

Thus, then, the years took their toll of her. Between the pleasures of the bed, the writing-desk and the dining-table, she waxed obese, outmoded, ridiculous, with her cosmetics, her balsams and her mincing speech.

And ever and anon, as she gazed across the plains, her thoughts turned to that little mountain-goat Navarre, who went on winning battles and drawing ever nearer and nearer to the throne.

LOVE AND MONEY

“WHO goes there?” rang out the sentries’ challenge.

“Love!” answered Navarre, in merry vein.

“Life of my life,” he shouted, as with beating heart he made his way into the château of Corisande.

His leathern doublet, his pale-grey breeches, were all in tatters. One of his riding-boots had cast its sole. His face and hands were scored and bleeding.

“Petiot, Petiot,” moaned Corisande in dismay, “why, you are wounded!”

“Tis but a scratch or two,” he answered with a laugh.

“What wild pranks have you been playing now, madman that you are?”

“Dear heart, I longed to see you. Two armies were besieging Nérac and trying to run me to earth there. I showed myself on the ramparts with my men, all lit up with flaring torches. I made the cannon speak. Meanwhile my horse was being led down by the turret stairway on the escarpment side, where no watch was kept, as it was regarded as impassable. And where my horse led, I followed. I galloped night and day, and here I am.”

“What madness! But you must be crazy, Petiot, quite crazy!”

“Corisande, I hungered and thirsted after you. If I had not seen you to-day, I should have died. Dear heart, do you love me?”

“I adore you!”

“You know I am under the Church’s ban and your people are going about preaching that whoso shall slay me will go straight to Paradise, and that whoso shall love me will burn in Hell. Know you that?”

“I love you better than my soul’s salvation, Henry.”

“Ah, my own beloved!”

He laid his head between her calm, sure hands, and wept for joy and passion.

When, thus softly scolding him, she had washed and dressed his scars, she sought a place beside him in the richly carven bed. Then, tired but happy, they lay and talked in pillowed ease.

The adventurous young King, whom love was fast refining, sought counsel from his wise beloved, who loved and admired and consoled him, and, kindling his pride, urged him on to greater and greater deeds.

"Do not wait until they have laid waste all the country round with fire and sword. Carry the war into their own country beyond the Loire, so that they may be consumed in the fires themselves have lighted. 'Tis the only way to bring them to reason. If not, they will put this poor Guyenne, already too cruelly ravaged, to tortures direr still."

"Even so I too had thought. But then to do so means to part from you, and how, my Corisande, how think you I could do that?"

"Go, and come back to me a conqueror, bringing with you the peace that you have forced them to accept."

He sighed, for, alas, that was not the only reason of his inactivity. Youth he had, and hope, and a fund of courage and daring, and a great talent for war. But money he had not. If men served him, it was for the love of him. Unhappily arms and ammunition are not to be had on such terms as these.

People were beginning to twit him with his poverty. To recompense the ever-faithful d'Aubigné, he had just presented him with his portrait, having naught else, neither money nor lands, to give him. And some cruel wit had put these lines at the foot of the royal portrait:

"Was ever heard of, such a prince:
A gentleman may aid him,
And with his painted portrait he
Will deem he's amply paid him.

"But money, Corisande, money! I haven't a farthing to call my own."

"Well, my coffers are full, fair sir. And woods and fields are mine in plenty. I'll sell them all and you shall have your gunpowder."

"Corisande . . ."

"Nay, but I fain would see my lover triumph. I have it in my mind that God means to do great things through you and for you in the days to be."

Navarre was little used to such magnanimity. Suspecting some chicanery, he asked her sharply:

"And what want you in exchange?"

"My Petiot, your greater, greater love. No, I ask you not for constancy, I'm not so blind as that, for you were born to roam, but I do ask that I may ever be first in your thoughts."

"What oath wouldst thou have me take, my dearest?" he replied, overcome with deep emotion.

"Swear by my heart, my heart that will ever be true to you," she answered.

Later on, when he had his hands in a bowl of those Damascus plums which are reputed to give fresh vigour to the weary, she looked on him long and lovingly, saying:

"Promise me, Petiot, for my peace of mind, that you will never again do the mad things you have done in the past. Remember, your life is dearer to me than my own. Do not wantonly expose yourself to danger. I would have you lead your army as heir to the throne of France, and not like the leader of a gang of adventurers, for ever in the rough-and-tumble of the fight. Will you promise me?" she pleaded, in tones of tenderness and love.

"I will do your bidding as far as in me lies."

"Nor ever speak too loud. There are eavesdroppers on every side."

"Nay, dear heart, fear nothing on that score."

"You will conquer, I know it, and as a pledge of my confidence, of my love, I give you my son. 'Twill be a sound school for him."

'Twas high time to rise. The night had come again. The Countess tended once again her lover's wounds, from which the blood still flowed.

"Give me a pen, my loved one."

She brought him a long goose quill. He dipped it in the wounded place, and with his own blood, on paper bearing the arms of Corisande, he wrote these words:

"We Henry, by the grace of God King of Navarre, promise and make oath before God, pledging thereto our royal and faithful word, unto the noble lady Diana of Andouins that we shall take her publicly and solemnly to be our wife and Queen so soon as peace shall be restored within this realm."

She looked upon him with adoring eyes, as he knelt before her.

"Adieu, my love, my life . . ." he sighed.

"Go, and return in triumph, Petiot, and God forgive me for loving you so, you heretic!"

Long, long upon the ramparts she stood and gazed at him as he rode away into the twilight. A stripling knight of twelve galloped beside him, and the wind that sighed in the plumes of their hats wafted to Corisande's straining ear the merry voices of the two beings she loved best in all the world.

THE TENTED FIELD

ACCOMPANIED by only twenty members of his suite, among whom was a Gascon, M. de Chicot, who called himself the King's jester, and ten soldiers of his bodyguard, all sworn to serve him to the death, Navarre forced a passage through the enemy's lines.

Appearing with disconcerting suddenness, now here, now there, he aimed at drawing the Leaguers, whose great object was to take him captive, out of Guyenne. Before long, his exploits began to spread dismay throughout their ranks. It seemed as if he were everywhere at once, with his sardonic laugh and his vaunting speeches. His white standard haunted the dreams of the Catholic leaders.

When they were in Poitou, Navarre kept out of sight, marched under cover of night, and spent the daytime in the woods, or in some lonely farm, or hidden in a haystack.

But all along, as he went his way, he kept adding to his numbers. The money was going like wildfire. It was all very well, now that he was beyond his own frontiers, to carry on the war Huguenot-fashion, that is to say, living on the country; it cost him a lot of money to feed his men. The King of Navarre knew that France belonged to him; it was his country, and he did not want to lay it waste. And so, though in terrible straits, he bought and paid for what he needed.

"Wheat is fifty pounds a load," said he. "It is a dreadful thing to see people dying of hunger."

Then the plague got on his heels. The sick and wounded, with no one to give them skilled attention, died like flies. At last, on the First of June, he arrived at La Rochelle, which he fitted out as his headquarters. With the money Corisande had given him he raised some troops in Germany. His "kind sister," Elizabeth, the Protestant Queen of England, sent him ships and stores.

Guise and his army, withdrawing northwards from Guyenne, were advancing on Poitou and threatening Marans, not far from La Rochelle. He immediately proceeded to put it in a posture of defence, riding on horseback right into the marshlands to see whether he could manœuvre his cavalry there. Despite the remonstrances of his squire, he thus approached within four hundred paces of the enemy. They trained their guns on him, but only succeeded in spattering him with mud. He then came back, leaving behind an outpost to which he gave the magic name of "Corisande" for a pass-word.

His beloved sent him letters by sea. Alas, too often her messengers were taken captive. All on fire with love, the King toiled on the ramparts, on shipboard, and in the country that was now attired in all the loveliness of June. He made believe that his mistress was with him, murmured words of love to her, chose horses for her to ride, and wrote to her unceasingly.

"I arrived last night from Marans, whither I had been to see the garrison, my dearest. Ah, how I longed to have you there! It is an island shut in by wooded marshlands. Every hundred yards or so, there are canals to allow the passage of boats for bringing in timber. The water is clear, with little movement in it. The canals are of varying width and the boats of all sizes. Amid this wilderness, there are a great number of gardens which are only to be reached by boat. The island is six miles in circumference, and such are its surroundings. A river flows at the foot of the castle, which is as habitable as the one at Pau. Few are the houses from whose door you cannot step straight into a small boat. The sea is only six miles off. The big vessels come upstream as far as Niort. There are mills and isolated farms without number; a great variety of singing birds and every kind of sea bird imaginable. I am sending you some of their plumage. As for fish, the quantity, the size and the price are astonishing. You can get a great carp for thirty sols and a pike for five. There is a lot of wheat, and excellent wheat, grown hereabouts. You can be happy here in time of peace, and safe when there is a war on.

You can spend blissful days here with one you love, and deplore her absence when she is away. Ah, how the place makes you feel like singing!"

Thus the summer went by. The soldiers went foraging about among the vines, and sometimes left their lives there. By September the King of Navarre had successfully resisted three armies of fresh and well-paid troops.

As for his own men . . . Well, sometimes, by great good luck, they would come in for a windfall. In August, for example, Henry, having got word that a convoy with six thousand crowns, intended as payment for the League troops, was about to arrive, ambushed it and carried off the money.

Corisande sold what timber she had left. When he received a letter from her, he kissed the seal before he broke it, and then replied.

"Believe me, my dearest, my faithfulness to you is pure white, without a stain. There was never anything like it. If that is calculated to give you pleasure, then you may live in happiness. Your slave adores you madly. I kiss your hands, dear heart, a million times."

Up to the time he reached La Rochelle, the King, forever in the saddle, had been more or less true to his vow. But . . . a soldier having disobeyed his captain, his fair young cousin went to plead for his forgiveness. Navarre sniffed the sweet aroma that exhaled from the suppliant crouching at his feet amid her spreading petticoats. Ah well, so much the worse for discipline, and old captains may go and bite their nails. The impertinent young popinjay was pardoned and given a new uniform, and Martine, his cousin, kept the King warm o' nights, for His Majesty was sick of sleeping alone.

She bore him a child. He was in the seventh heaven, and granted her a pension of two thousand crowns. The Ministers growled and grumbled. Things were hard enough already, in all conscience.

That same night—since his sojourn at the Louvre his ears were

of the keenest—that same night, he heard his squire, in the dressing-chamber where he was quartered with a captain of the guard, saying in a low voice to the latter:

“La Force, that master of ours is a rank miser and the most thankless rascal on earth.”

“What? What’s that you say, d’Aubigné?” stammered his companion, who was half-asleep.

“He says that I’m a rank miser and the most thankless rascal on earth,” the King called out, with a laugh.

D’Aubigné lay low and said nothing. Next day the King gave him no grim looks. Later on he summoned him to the young mother’s bedside and presented him with his pink and squalling bratling.

“D’Aubigné, you must bring him up for me. Make a sensible man of him and a valiant captain, like yourself.”

“I thank you, Sire, most heartily. But I would rather go a-campaigning with you. I’m no hand at rearing bastards.”

“Ah, foolish, surly old comrade, will you never do a single thing to please me?”

“I am no courtier, Sire.”

They had shared too many perils together ever to have a serious quarrel, despite their numerous squabbles.

“Let *me* have him, Sire,” said Chicot. “I will make him as mad as I am. I will teach him how to laugh, which is a thing that all the wiseacres on your council would never be able to do. It’s a good thing for bastards to be amused. Otherwise they take to plotting.”

“’Tis well, Chicot, thou shalt have him.”

At the Council of the *Chaise Percée*, which was the most important in all Courts, the King of Navarre was sharing out Anjou, which he had just conquered.

But the long-drawn faces made it abundantly clear that no one thought the game at all amusing. For six months the affairs of the party had been in a pretty parlous state. The Queen of Eng-

land promised more than she performed. How were they going to get through the winter? Navarre, it is true, would have it that God was still on their side, but this warrior King, who went about from place to place always with some new wench to make much of, rearing his bastards and bringing up his mistress's son in the way he should go, said nothing that was at all helpful to his ministers.

Then came a new and charming adventure. Esther de Bois-lambert was now his fount of joy. Another child was born to him. Everywhere he went, he took his little family along with him, with their nurses and their doctors. To fondle and dandle their little naked, chubby bodies was his great delight. He showed them off, and himself with them, and bandied jests with their nurse, a strapping, free-spoken wench.

Martine died. Esther was superseded. The little ones stayed on at their father's side.

"Gentlemen, why do you pull such long faces? Our adversaries are offering to make peace."

"What is that? Sire, you are jesting."

"No, by my troth! The rascally old woman, the old mischief-maker, always ready to change her tune and her friends, is now beginning to discover that the Guises have too much power. What shall I do, gentlemen? It is my idea that we ought to hear what they have to say."

"Sire, that is likewise our opinion. Howbeit, take heed to yourself, for the old viper is poisonous still, despite her age. The tidings of your death have already been going the round in Paris these last few days."

HENRY AND CATHERINE

MEDDLESOME as ever, Catherine again took the road, to go and find Navarre. Guise had the royal champion of cup-and-ball completely in his pocket. Something had to be done to counteract that. Henry must be approached, for Henry had a lucky star.

The parleys had been going on for two months when the old Queen, accompanied as usual by her numerous and tumultuous suite, set out on the road to Poitou.

"What does she want now?" said Navarre to himself. "What dark designs are germinating in that fertile brain?"

What she wanted was what she had always wanted, and that was power, and, next to that, her son-in-law's conversion and return to Court.

When it came to fixing on a place for the meeting, Navarre began playing his disappearing game. She waited for him a whole month at Saint Maixent, but all she got was fine speeches and apologies.

"You are fooling me," she wrote. "It's a deadly business having anything to do with you. Please now, no more of these delays! Come and show me that you are still as anxious to see me as you always said you were."

Her big, puffy, faded face grew sallow and sallow with all this uncertainty and delay. At last he fixed on Cognac, and off she trotted thither. But at Cognac there was no one there; so on again she needs must go, just a little farther.

All along the Charente road that was half-frozen over, the wintry blast blew chill, finding its way through satin doublet and velvet gown. The brilliant retinue looked pinched and wan and hardly spoke a word.

High on a hill, for all the world to see, four hundred horsemen,

fully armed, kept watch on the highway and the château. The King of Navarre was with them.

She seemed to have aged so much, the old murderess, that Henry was taken aback and made her a lowlier bow than usual. Claspng him in her arms, she pressed him tightly to her breast, a tear glistening in her eye, and, as she did so, Navarre could feel her trying to find out whether he had a coat-of-mail beneath his doublet. He laughed aloud, quite glad to find her still her old, familiar self. Unbuttoning, he let her see his naked chest.

"Look you, Madame, I dispense with caution among friends."

She gushed more immoderately than ever, called her ladies to her side in order that they might rejoice with her over this happy meeting, delivered herself of innumerable compliments.

"Now, my son, are we going to get to business?" she said in honeyed tones.

"I should greatly like to, Madame," he replied.

"Tell me what your ideas are."

"My ideas, Madame, are identical with Your Majesty's."

"Come now, a truce to all this ceremony and tell me what you really want."

"Madame, I make no demands and I have only come hither that I might learn your pleasure."

"Tut, tut, now come, make an opening of some sort."

Navarre glanced round the circle of ladies who were putting on their most bewitching smiles.

"Madame," he replied, "I see no opening for me here."

When the laughter had ceased, the Queen-Mother returned to the charge.

"Will you be the cause of the country's ruin? No one else, the King excepted, has a greater interest in its welfare than you."

"Evidently, Madame, neither you nor the King thought so hitherto, for you dispatched eight armies against me."

"Armies? What armies, forsooth? My son, you are labouring under a delusion. Think you that if the King had wanted to crush you, he could not have done so? It was not the power that was

lacking; but the will. The King loves you and honours you. He desires to have you near him and to embrace you as a brother."

"Madame, I most humbly thank him."

"But will you not do as he says?"

"Madame, the King, who is, as it were, my father, so far from cherishing me as a son, has pursued me like a wolf, and you, Madame, like a lioness."

"Believe me, my son, the King and I are only anxious for your welfare."

"Pardon me, Madame, I think the contrary."

"Let us leave all that, my son. Do you intend that all the trouble which I have taken these six months or more should be completely thrown away?"

"Madame, it is not I who am responsible for that, but you. I am not preventing you from sleeping quietly in your bed. All I know is that for eighteen months you have kept me out of mine."

"And am I always to be kept on the rack like this, I who only long for peace and quiet?"

"Madame, these worries are meat and drink to you, you thrive on them. If your mind were at rest, it would be the end of you."

"How comes it that you, who were once so gentle and tractable, now display such wrath, not only in your looks but in your words?"

"Too true, Madame. The long marches and the evil treatment to which you have subjected me have brought about this change, and made me lose my natural character."

"Well, then, if you can do nothing else, let us make a truce for a time. While it lasts, you may confer with your ministers with a view to bringing about a satisfactory peace."

"I will do so, Madame."

"But to obtain such a peace, it is essential that you become a Catholic again."

"Ah, Madame," was Navarre's insolent reply, "I am sorry to see that age has impaired your memory. I am loyal to my faith. Know you not that?"

"Oh, well, what I *do* know is that you are not master in your own house. You cannot do as you would like to do."

"Pardon me, Madame. I do, not what I will, nor what I can, but what I ought."

The inflexible young King bent low over the royal hand, still white and beautiful, and withdrew. Catherine, discomfited, fell into a reverie.

By her daughter, Claude de Lorraine, she had a granddaughter of marriageable age. All her children had served her as a lure. Should this little Christine do nothing for her? Henry III was growing weaker every day, and Navarre, with his lucky star, was getting nearer and nearer to the throne. She proposed that he should put away his wretched wife and she would give him Christine. She calculated that when he had made Christine bear him an heir, she would dispatch him to a better world, and get herself appointed regent during the minority of her great-grandson.

These strange proposals of hers remained without reply. Her spies informed her that the Huguenots were plotting to carry her off, and had already fixed her ransom at four millions. She departed in precipitate haste, followed at a respectful distance by her son-in-law, who was opposed to the abduction.

THE FLAGS OF COUTRAS

THE negotiations having broken down, hostilities were resumed immediately. Navarre pressed the German mercenaries, who had not yet crossed the frontier, to hasten to his rescue. How he was going to pay them, heaven only knew!

With a steel helmet on his head, clad in a grey tunic and heavily accoutred in his sable arms, Henry of Navarre was everywhere at once, sleeping in his bed no more, but couching on the hard ground even as his soldiers did, exposing himself at the outposts, toiling away with the pick and shovel in the trenches, laying mines, eating his victuals on the roadside, a piece of bread and bacon with a pinch of garlic, between his thumb and forefinger, as a peasant would.

He laughed at the bullets which grazed him, or went right through his clothes; he jested with his soldiers, who adored him, and, well-fed or starving, willingly laid down their lives for him.

One day they had to bring him back to La Rochelle on an ox-wagon, so completely worn out was he.

The troops of the League were doing their best to prevent the Germans from effecting a junction with him, and were slaughtering Huguenots wholesale in Poitou. Before very long, however, this army, unable to draw sustenance from a country that had been bled white, was compelled to fall back. Navarre, with his indefatigable cavaliers, pursued it, harassed it and threw it into confusion.

One night, news was brought to this demoralised army that Navarre was close to Coutras. As, however, he was continually said to be everywhere, skirmishing and raiding on every side, the report was simply regarded as an outcome of the terror which this demon of a man inspired. So the Catholic army turned over and went to sleep.

Suddenly a volley of musketry rang out amid the silence of the

night. Navarre was taking up his position at Coutras. When day came, the battle began. In merry, dare-devil mood, confident of victory, Navarre strode up and down the lines of his army. Good fortune danced and sparkled in his eyes.

"My friends, 'tis for the glory of God, for honour and for our lives that we are going to do battle."

D'Aubigné chanted a solemn and uplifting psalm, which the Protestant army took up in unison.

Just opposite were the enemy leaders. One of the King's favourites and his brother, both of them painted and powdered, frizzed and perfumed, exquisitely attired, delicate creatures who were always having medicines and clysters to preserve their complexions, began to chaff these rough and swarthy campaigners, who smelt so intolerably of sweat and gunpowder.

Navarre was utterly reckless of danger. As the battle went on, degenerating into a hand-to-hand fight, he plunged boldly into the ranks of the enemy, but though scarred and scratched several times, he escaped any serious wound. Elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp, he seemed to be beyond the reach of bullets.

When the victorious Protestants returned from pursuing their vanquished adversaries, darkness was falling upon two thousand dead; four hundred wounded horses were whinnying faintly. The corpses of the Catholic leaders were lying on a table in the headquarters that had fallen into Navarre's hands. He knew these handsome young favourites. The savagery of the Valois-Medici who insulted and mutilated their dead foes had always made his gorge rise. He had the two bodies hurriedly embalmed that he might restore them to their family.

Here then, all night long, in this house, with its flags, its dead and dying, he paced to and fro unceasingly.

"Shall I press home my victory?" he asked himself. "I haven't men enough. The Germans are coming, but the King is sending an army of fresh troops to intercept them and prevent them from joining forces with me. There will be some stiff fighting. Am I to sacrifice my old comrades in order to get them out of their

trouble? And if I bring them along with me, these Germans, how am I going to pay them, when I haven't the money to pay my own brave Gascons? The unhappy country will have to endure pillage, massacres and rapine. If I make war, it is because I am obliged to do so, to defend these poor folk who insist on saying their prayers in French instead of Latin. Shall I, out of pure wantonness, go and destroy my country? All this bloodshed grieves me sorely. These foreigners—Albanians, Spaniards, Germans—I despise them all. They are all agog at the idea of getting into France. My mother used to show them to me long ago, all gorged with blood and swilling the wine of the Gironde. Altar linen went to make shifts for their wenches, and pages torn from missals served as litter for their horses. On the other hand, my companions-in-arms desire to return to their homes. They are going to disband themselves and I shall be left alone. . . . If I depart, it is to give the King a proof of my good-will. I want him to know that it is the Guises who are obstinately prolonging this war and not I. Moreover, haven't I promised Corisande, who financed my campaign, that she should have some flags? I long for her madly. I want to see her eyes, her sweet, adoring eyes; I want to kiss her faithful lips, I want to taste bliss once more."

Cry after cry, as the surgeons tended the wounded, broke in upon Navarre's thoughts. By morning he had made up his mind. He gathered together the twenty-two flags, loaded them on to his charger, gave a few orders and then, quite alone, without so much as a squire in attendance, he set his face southwards, abandoning the German mercenaries to their fate. Guise engaged and defeated them, not, however, without considerable losses on his own side.

October was beginning to lay a fiery finger on the leaves. Navarre, by the skin of his teeth, got through every ambush that was laid for him, and flung himself into Pau like a lover gone mad. Leaping from his horse and weeping with joy, he quaffed the pure sparkling waters of the Gave. The snow lay thick upon the peaks

of the Pyrenees. Long and eagerly he drank in the life-giving air that came down from the heights.

Then, with a heart overflowing with love, he galloped away over the fields where the evening mists hung low and the bells of the kine were tinkling, to Corisande, with her sweetly smiling face.

It was two whole years since he had seen her. In the great hall of the castle, its walls hung with sombre tapestry, he was welcomed by a lady so stately that he felt quite humble in her presence.

"Petiot. . . ."

The familiar, affectionate appellation brought the conqueror, laden with his torn and dusty flags, to a sudden halt.

"Petiot . . . so here you are then!"

How maternal was her mien, how stately! And plainly she was past her prime. Suddenly he remembered they were both of an age, thirty-six. Heaven, how the years had flown!

Ever since he had started off from Coutras along that ambush-haunted road, over which he had sped so fast, he had been promising himself some blissful hours.

Dropping on one knee, he presented his homage to the Countess. She extended her hand. What a protecting gesture, what grandeur, what loftiness of mien! He felt chilled. From afar he valued these qualities at a high rate; but just at the moment, a fresh young dairymaid with her simple charms, or the veriest little drab of the streets, or, come to that, some riper gossip with a ribald tongue, would have been more to the taste of this war-worn, travel-weary warrior.

After dinner, they mounted to my lady's chamber. Anything like the old love-making seemed miles away. Navarre's face fell. He sat him down in a low chair in front of the fire as he had done of old. From her lofty armchair, that looked like a throne, Corisande, all stiff and starchy in her steel corsets, drew down her loved one's head and pressed it to her bosom. Ah, would that her hips had been a whit less bony.

Petiot had no need to be caressed and fondled. He wanted to do

the caressing and fondling himself. . . . Ah, these everlasting cross-purposes!

The hours went by. For a long while now it had been time to go to bed. Winking at each other, with a knowing look in their eyes, the servants had warmed the sheets and made all comfortable. But there they both sat on by the fire, chatting away like any sober old man and wife. There were dizzying gulfs of silence and reticence between them now.

He told her all about his victories. Well, what *was* he to talk of now to this woman with the very unkissable face? What was he to do with this tall, thin form that kindled in him no spark of desire? One doesn't care to make free with the stately raiment of so majestic a personage; one doesn't go touselling an empress. One respects an empress, and one can't make love—respectfully!

Now and again he was conscious that she was looking at him mysteriously. But he showed no inclination to plumb the mystery. He yawned.

Corisande was too sensitive, too subtle not to guess what was passing in the mind and heart of this most volatile, most elusive of lovers. She ordered the twenty-two flags to be brought to her, and with them she adorned her nakedness. So lofty, so noble her mien, she was transformed, as it were, into the statue of Victory, of glory. No, it was Corisande no more. Not here was his one-time beloved, so prim, so proud and now so *passée*. It was Glory! And one doesn't go billing and cooing with Glory. He took her as he took his towns—by storm.

When morning broke, after these nocturnal activities, the ruthless southern sun, giving no quarter, lit up a scene of desolation, revealing the flags tossed about in lamentable disarray and a countenance on which the passage of the years had only too clearly left its trace.

"Farewell, Corisande. . . ."

She loved him too sincerely to descend to pretty speeches, and he, who had such a taste for pretty speeches, found her cold.

"Farewell, my life. . . ."

His followers were thunderstruck at his slipping away from Coutras. They could not understand why he should treat the King of France so gently and throw away like this the fruits of victory. His counsellors fiercely denounced this amorous escapade. Were women *always* to be his bane?

He smiled to himself and said never a word.

Yet once again Henry III sounded him secretly regarding terms of peace. Sick of being bullied by the Guises, the pusillanimous monarch sought to conciliate his brother-in-law. Patiently, with watchful eye, the latter awaited the course of events, keeping his hand in, meanwhile, with minor combats undertaken to rid Guyenne of the last remaining hostile bands which still infested it.

To Corisande he wrote in terms of tenderest affection; but he saw her not. He had no wish to renew the experiences of that disastrous night. Sometimes the memory of his promise to marry her, the promise written in his own blood, gave him a twinge of conscience; but Corisande was too proud to speak of it, and only lamented that she could not be sure of one so volatile.

Of course he loved her still; she was foremost in his heart. . . . A year went by. Something was always happening at the last moment to prevent their meeting. Where there's no will, there's never a way. Besides, other preoccupations intervened to keep the fickle one from thinking over-much of love. Condé had just died—poisoned. A few days later he himself barely escaped assassination. The members of his suite went in such sore dread of poison that they dared not taste the meats that were brought to the royal table. They delegated the task to the dogs. To hear them talk, the only safe way was to drink water from the spring and to eat nothing but boiled eggs.

All this weighed upon Navarre. He grew dispirited, took his meals in solitude, shunned society, got it into his head that he was going to die.

The Duke of Guise had reasserted his ascendancy over the weak-willed King, and the war against the heretics began anew.

Just as he was hurrying away to take the field, Navarre, now easier in his mind, wrote thus to Corisande:

"God knows how it grieves me to go hence without being able to kiss your hands. Of a truth, I am in a sorry case. Love me, my all, my life! The thought that you care for me bears me up amid the shock of my afflictions. Take not this succour from me. Good night, dear heart. I shower my kisses on your feet."

THE DEATH OF GUISE

THE King of Navarre went forth on foot to reconnoitre the country round about Beauvoir-sur-Mer, which he had invested as far as the port of Bouin. A few members of his suite and some guards were with him.

For some days past, the King, who was for ever fighting, making prisoners and capturing flags, had seemed thoughtful and perplexed. His second little bastard son was sick of the fever, and they had bled him to such a point that the poor little wretch had not strength enough to cry. The elder of the two had died the year before. A moist breeze blew out the folds of his yellow mantle as he quickened his pace in order to outdistance his attendants. He wanted to speak with his squire alone.

"God have you in his keeping, Sectarius, Manlius, Torquatus and old Cato, or whatever even dourer captain the history of ancient Greece or Rome may furnish forth. God keep you, I say. But come hither; I have need of your rough fidelity, your rugged loyalty this day." So he spoke, forcing himself to assume a cheerful tone.

Ever since yesterday d'Aubigné had known what was amiss with his master. But he held his peace.

"Now, look you. I intend to marry. What say you to that?"

"Sire, am I, then, to understand that the Queen of Navarre is dead?"

"No, but the time cannot be far off when someone will come to tell me that the lady of the camels, this betitled toss-pot, has been strangled, since the Queen, her most worthy mother, has suggested that I should take Christine of Lorraine to wife."

"So it is for Her Highness that——"

"No, no, old friend, my princess has no dominion save my heart."

"Beshrew me, that is a rare thing indeed where thrones and dominations are concerned."

"Even so. And now the world shall behold a Queen who has been wedded simply for love."

"I know not if Cupid is an ally to be desired. . . ."

The King took a deep breath and then delivered himself of the following, as though it had been a lesson learnt by heart:

"I could give you thirty examples of princes, ancient and modern, who have lived happily with brides of lowly estate. This looking about for great alliances has spelt ruin both to princes and their countries."

"True, Sire, there are shining examples, but they do not apply to your case. The princes you have in mind reigned over peaceful lands. They were not hunted and harassed wanderers like you, that have no revenue but your good name. Bear well in mind, Sire, that the Duke of Alençon is no more. There is but one step now betwixt you and the throne. See that you bring not all to naught, by showing too much haste. You are now thirty-six, an age when a man should have learnt to subdue his passions. Before you follow the example of the princes you have in mind, wait till you are situated like them."

The King's visage cleared. D'Aubigné thought to himself that when a lover seeks for counsel, it means that love itself—generally too prone to folly—is growing cool.

"Thou art always in the right, my sage old Cato. Well then, I promise you I'll wait two years before I marry Corisande. My mistress, moreover, is in no hurry, and . . ."

A commotion among the reeds of the marshes gave them warning that some unusual presence was at hand. D'Aubigné uttered a loud shout. Five-and-forty foemen were pointing their muskets straight at them. The squire flung himself in front of the King, who grappled with him to thrust him aside. At this point the members of his suite and the guards came hurriedly upon the scene, and, passing back the King from one to another, pushed him behind them. Then, defying the forty-five arquebuses, they leapt

forward, sword in hand, into the marsh, and put the enemy to rout.

A few days after the conversation we have just narrated, Navarre took Beauvoir. Autumn came on as he was settling himself in at the château with his dying child. How he adored the little thing, once so round and plump, always laughing, always prattling.

A storm was raging along the coast, the castle keep was lashed by the furious blast; vessels could not leave harbour. Navarre felt like a man cut off from the world, a lost and lonely spirit.

Like him the King of France was a wanderer, driven forth from Paris by the victorious Guises. The old sower of discord who thrived on whirlwinds, had been won over by them, and she immediately set out in haste for Chartres, where Henry III had taken refuge and donned a monk's habit. She thought to bring him back, perchance to hand him over to his adversaries, this son whom of old she had loved so dearly. He had grown recalcitrant, he obeyed her not. She succeeded in persuading him to appoint the Duke of Guise Generalissimo of the Royal Armies. That done she came back; the sinister sorceress returned to her poisons, her Machiavelli, her astrologer's towers—which she had built in all her châteaux.

A chill ran through Navarre as he gently took in his arms the little motionless body that could not keep warm. A great wave of love and compassion invaded his paternal heart. He breathed on the little cold hands, and with his dark beard streaked with silver caressed the little neck all smelling of milk. The doctors, grouped around the cradle, shook their sapient heads. Towards night the baby died.

Apart, in his room, the father sat weeping. His tears fell on the paper on which he was writing, in feverish haste:

"I am terribly upset at the death of my little one. He was just beginning to talk. Dear heart, I have a strange longing to see you. I don't know when I shall have that happiness. Keep me in your good graces, my dearest, and always be assured of my inviolable fidelity. Good night, my darling; how I wish I were at your fireside to-night. I kiss your feet a million times."

At the States-General which, with a sudden return of will-power, the King of France convened at Blois, Henry of Navarre was solemnly declared guilty of lèse-majesté, divine and human, and deprived of all rights to the throne. The Guises, who had the effrontery to attend, compelled the poor, terrified monarch to bow to their wishes.

Among the Huguenots, Henry was ill-spoken of. He was blamed for his moderation towards the King and the Catholics; and for the scandal of his private life.

Bitterness began to possess him. The sight of the kingdom, laid waste by this fratricidal strife, tore at his heart-strings. Nevertheless, he was but defending himself and defending his menaced brethren. How was he to reconcile every one? For a long time now all his illusions had been dispelled. These so-called wars of religion were but a pretext on the part of the leaders to throw dust in the eyes of the people. It was not the kingdom of heaven they wanted to win, but the kingdom of earth.

The future loomed as dark and as ominous as the stormy winter sky that overhung the seething ocean. There were moments when the royal wanderer began to mistrust his star, and to lose hope.

To escape from carking realities, he would sometimes have a common camp follower brought to him at the castle, or a peasant girl in sabots whose sweaty odour gave him no distaste for her rustic charms. But for some days now he had had no taste for anything. Man delighted him not; no, nor woman neither.

One of his captains had let himself be caught at La Garnache. Henry set off by night to the rescue. All that night and all the next day he was in the saddle, fully armed. Frozen stalactites were hanging from the black branches. It had been freezing relentlessly for a fortnight.

He grew feverish, and his men had to help him from his horse. They sat him down on a travelling-chest whilst they made up a camp-bed for him. Just as they were taking off his breastplate a messenger, at his last gasp, rushed into the tent.

"Sire! Sire!" he cried, "the Duke of Guise and the Cardinal . . ."

"Well, friend, what of them?"

"The King has had them put to death at Blois, Sire!"

"*Ventre-Saint-Gris!*" cried the sick monarch, turning pale. "If thou sayest the truth, ask of me what thou wilt."

"On my soul, Sire, I swear it. I saw their dead bodies, pierced through and through with dagger-strokes, exposed to view in the market-place. I saw them burnt and their ashes thrown into the river."

"Long live the King!" shouted Chicot the Jester.

The gentlemen of his suite came crowding in, flung their hats into the air and shouted for joy. This put a new face on things with a vengeance. There was no saying what might happen now.

"Gentlemen," said the King of Navarre, whose beard was quivering with excitement, "this event must be marked by a special and public service of thanksgiving to God. After that we will summon a meeting of our Council."

Chicot clambered on to the table, and, holding up his sword like a sceptre, pronounced the following solemn declaration:

"Hark ye, burghers and tillers of the soil, and you, gentlemen of my suite, these tidings have cast us into such grievous affliction of the spirit that we have resolved, after rendering due thanks to the Creator, to celebrate it with a joyous feast. Such is our royal pleasure!"

"Ah, my heart, my heart fails me!" gasped Henry.

Every one rushed forward. D'Aubigné made them stand back, and, posting a couple of guards at the door of the tent, he laid his master's lifeless body on the bed. There were no physicians there. There was only one surgeon with the men. The *valet de chambre* went to fetch him; but what could he do? He could not bleed the King unless the physicians ordered him to do so. He could but look on and see him die. . . .

"I can stand it no more," groaned Navarre at last. "Delay no longer. Open my side and bleed me, for it feels as if it were full of matter."

On the seventh day, the crisis occurred, the fever departed and

the King was himself again. D'Aubigné, all smiles, drew near to his bedside.

"Sire," he said, "they say the old viper is going to die."

Could it be so? Was the long duel going to end at last? The sick man heaved a sigh. That combat had lent spice to life, and he would miss it. He knew all about Catherine's tricks and treacheries and took a delight in circumventing them. . . . And so henceforth he would be free to drink his wine, enjoy his dishes, sleep without fear, and with whom he liked. Could it really be?

He looked up at the sky. It was the purest blue.

"Assuredly," said he, still doubting, "there would have been some sort of portent if she was dead."

"The shock of seeing Guise killed was too much for her. Trust me, Sire, the news is true. Good tidings never come singly."

CATHERINE

A VAGUE dread filled the King's bosom as he gazed pensively at the dead body of the Duc de Guise lying at his feet.

"Ah, he is greater dead than living," said he.

Drawing his velvet cloak more tightly about his quivering bosom, he went and sought comfort from his mother, whom he feared, yet could not do without, whom he hated—and adored.

"How fares it with you, Madame?"

"Alas, my son, but moderately well."

"I," said he triumphantly, "am as well as can be. I've killed the King of Paris."

Darkly she looked at him, took stock of him, and shook her head.

"What have you done, think you? God grant no ill may come of it."

Guise's death meant her downfall. This gesture of convulsive weakness which the King had just displayed was in her eyes directed against herself. What did the future hold in store?

Kissing the talisman made of human blood, goat's blood and various metals melted together under her constellations, she ordered her attendants to dress her, and help her up to her astrologer's tower.

Ruggieri, whom she had condemned to the galleys and then taken back again because she was too superstitious to let him remain there, bowed low before the tyrannical old woman, with her fallow face and flabby cheeks. They both gazed long at the field of night sparkling with innumerable stars. Then the astrologer surrounded his Queen with a magic circle, and in darkened mirrors they sought the secrets of the future which the stars laid bare.

The icy breath of the January wind charioted by the waters of the Loire penetrated beneath the violet robe of the aged woman and laid a chill upon her heart.

Ruggieri, pale as death, said nothing. He could not lie to her, for he knew she was as deeply versed as he in the signs of the heavens. She read them clearly enough. That wondrous sky spoke only of calamity for her. The light of her star had disappeared.

"*Stupido! Bestia!*" said she to the astrologer, who had fallen on his knees before her.

Holding on to the walls she descended and sought her couch once more. What availed it to struggle against the Shadow that was drawing near? And as the future was denied to her, she turned her eyes towards the past. She had aspired to be the Mother of Europe, this base-borne Florentine who claimed to be descended from a Gaulish chief. For a moment she had held within the confines of her family Scotland, Poland, Spain, Navarre, all but the Empire, and England. Now all her grandiose scheme had fallen in ruins. Even France itself was slipping away from the last of her sons.

Had she the evil eye? Was she a bringer of evil? Disaster had fallen upon her kinsfolk. Her husband slain; Mary of Scotland, her daughter-in-law, beheaded; the Guises, almost all her kinsfolk. And all her children, ay, worst of all, her children. She put her hands to her fateful loins: eight children. Six of them were rotting underground, and two above it.

And all those, too numerous to count, who had been done away with, poisoned, tortured.

"I did but defend myself," she groaned, "myself, my children and their birthright."

What a hand she had played! And lost. A tear, the first genuine tear, the only one she had ever shed, trickled slowly down her withered cheek.

No one came near her when she lay a-dying. They knew her too well, by this time. Her son was the only one who came to see the last of her. Would she hoodwink God as she had hoodwinked every one else?

"*Come stà, Mamma?*"

She looked on her son with the great, fixed eyes of dying folk.



HENRY III

British Museum

Seized with fright he started back, his long string of death's-head beads in his tremulous fingers.

With a gesture of despair and impatience, she turned her face to the wall, and died.

No one shed a tear for Catherine. She who, in her sole person, had united so many great qualities was no more remembered than a dead goat. Or if anyone did recall her, it was to hold her memory up to execration.

Her heart was black, black through and through, hard as a diamond barbed with steel. So wrote a contemporary.

And the preachers in their pulpits said:

"If by chance it should occur to you of your charity to give her an Our Father and a Hail Mary, it would not be amiss."

Lonely and bewildered, Henry III, assailed by the fury of the Leaguers, burning to avenge their slaughtered chief, in constant danger of his life, called on the Strong One to come to his aid, on the Fox who, with his courage and his good humour, was advancing his cause in marvellous fashion. So it was "Navarre to the rescue!" From Châtellerault, Henry, aghast at the state of his country, sent forth a resounding manifesto. . . .

"What purpose has been served by all these wretched wars, all this bloodshed, the death of a million men, the squandering of a whole gold-mine? The answer is, the people's ruin, the mortal sickness of the State, disasters without number.

"Actuated solely by a due appreciation of my country's misery, by the love of peace and the splendour of our national tradition, I call upon all who have the sacred love of peace at heart, whatever their state or condition of life, to rally round me."

A messenger came with an answer to it when he was in camp six miles from Tours.

"My brother," said Henry III, "I should like to see you and to talk with you. I am at the château of Plessis-les-Tours. I will send boats to bring you across the water."

"Sire, go not thither, we implore you," said the members of his

Council. "You will be putting yourself, unarmed and defenceless, into the hands of a treacherous and uncertain King who has never wrought you aught but ill."

But since the death of the old traitress, Navarre had cast aside all fear. He would not let such a chance go by, even if it cost him his life.

Arrayed in his threadbare doublet, and russet velvet breeches, a scarlet cloak and a grey hat, set off with a white plume, he arrived at the meeting-place attended by only two companions.

A brilliant concourse of nobles were assembled in the park. The archers made a passage through the throng for this very shabby-looking King.

"Make way, there! Way for the King!"

The puffed and pallid countenance of Henry III appeared with the paint falling off in flakes on to his wide collar and pearl necklaces. Navarre bowed low, sweeping the ground with his plume. The other embraced him.

Spectators, full of joyful curiosity, thronged the precincts of the château. Did this reconciliation mean peace at last?

"Long live the Kings!" they cried.

The interview lasted two hours. An alliance was agreed upon. The King of France, so fallen, repudiated by three-fourths of his subjects, the "accursed tyrant," was counting on the little heretic princeling to win him back his kingdom. In exchange, he recognised him, unconditionally, as his heir.

"Dearest, I am writing to you from Blois, where I was once condemned as a heretic and declared unfit to succeed to the throne. Behold me now its principal support! See how God works for those who put their trust in Him. I am very well and swear in very truth that there is nothing in the world I love and honour so much as you, and I will remain faithful to you unto death."

Corisande, with a sigh, took up a pen and, crossing out the word "faithful," wrote "faithless" there instead.

LONG LIVE THE KING!

THIS King, bedaubed and bedizened like an Egyptian mummy, crowned with a Turkish turban which he never took off—syphilis had denuded so many heads that wigs and drugs were sold for their weight in gold—this pusillanimous monarch with one foot in the grave—how could the lusty, full-blooded Navarre help taking pity on him?

In his tent, carpeted with luxurious rugs and hung with costly tapestries, with his little, scented lap-dogs around him and the twelve striplings whom he was teaching to play the lute and who slept in his dressing-chamber, Henry III was rubbing up his grammar. His costly weapons, graven with scenes of gallantry, would have been useless in a real fight. From time to time he would anoint his beautiful hands with cream, those hands so deeply stained with blood.

"An you love me, brother," cried he in his squeaky voice, "do for heaven's sake sit down. It wearies me to see you for ever turning and twisting about like a squirrel."

"Good my lord, my feet are itching to be out on the road again."

Borne at the head of his tough and fiery mountaineers, the white banner of Henry of Navarre wrought a marvellous effect. He himself was in the saddle night and day. His valour excited the courage of Henry III who, fired again with the ardour that had once been his at Jarnac and Montcontour, joined him for a space to crush the forces of the League. The revolted towns surrendered; the Oise was crossed.

And now with forty thousand men at their back, with artillery and provisions in plenty, the two Kings were laying siege to Paris.

While his men were preparing the château at Saint-Cloud for his reception, Henry III, raising with his jewelled fingers the curtain of his tent, gazed with Navarre upon the rebellious city.

"They call me Nero," said he, "and Herod the Cruel, and Man of Sodom, and Brother Henry of the Whipped-Friars. They have decapitated my portrait which stood over the High Altar at Notre-Dame, and fouled with ordure others that I had given to religious houses. They have driven me forth with ignominy and are seeking to compass my death. I will give them to the flames and raze their city to the ground!"

"To-morrow, Sire, when they have done with their processions and are tired of walking in their shirts with nothing on their feet, chanting and carrying tapers, they will come and deliver up the keys. A few more cannon-balls in their defences will help to teach them reason."

"Henriot, I loathe them, the curs; we must punish them with a heavy hand."

The King's little popinjays advanced, pursing up their lips: Navarre's rough, noisy, malodorous Gascons were not at all to their taste.

"Cap de Diou, Sire," exclaimed Chicot, "these little coxcombs will be the death of me. I saw them last night scourging themselves for their sins."

"Had you nothing better to do than that, you booby? Why, in the taverns here there are the prettiest, plumpest little wenches . . ."

Navarre had just made himself master of the bridge of Saint-Cloud and was pushing forward in the direction of the Pré-aux-Clercs, when a messenger galloped up post-haste.

"Sire, the King is wounded."

"Let us to the château, gentlemen!" he said to the members of his suite.

Henry III was in bed. Being in no pain, he thought his wound was not dangerous, and bade every one be of good cheer. Taking Navarre's horny hand in his, he told him how the thing had happened.

"I was seated this morning on the stool, with a dressing-gown about my shoulders, when a young monk, hailing from Paris,

craved a word with me. I gave orders that he should be admitted, because he brought letters from the Comte de Brienne, and I thought that if I did not see him people would go blazoning it about that I was against the monks. He gave me the letters; then, while I was reading them, he begged that he might speak with me in private. He was a delicious creature, that youthful shaveling. I sent every one away except Bellegarde, who sat on in his corner. Then the varlet, drawing a long knife from his sleeve, stuck it into me just below the navel. I at once pulled it out and struck the wretch with it, shouting out 'Kill him!' And kill him they did. I'm sorry, for he would have told us who had sent him. He did not come on his own initiative, that is certain; he was so good-looking and so young, with the ways and expression of an angel, this young Jacques Clément."

Navarre left the King busily penning a letter to his consort, who had remained behind at Blois. Thus he wrote:

"My darling, God be praised, 'tis nothing and I expect to be quite well and about again in a few days. Pray God for me."

But Navarre did not go far away.

He was taking his supper at the foot of the château with the seneschal, when word was brought to him that the King was dying. He sent for Monsieur de Rosny, the future Duc de Sully, whom he had kept at his side ever since his departure from Guyenne.

"Friend, what think you of the state of affairs?"

"Let us go, Sire, and see for ourselves; afterwards we shall be able to discuss them."

They donned their breastplates, in case of need, armed themselves, and made their way into the château. Henry III, who was not yet quite gone, murmured faintly:

"My brother, you will never be King unless you first become a Catholic. . . ."

No sooner had the physicians pronounced life extinct, than the Scottish Guard threw themselves at Navarre's feet.

"Sire, you are our King and Master now!"

But in the death-chamber the nobles rammed their hats more tightly on their heads and, clenching their fists, cried fiercely:

"We would rather die a thousand deaths, rather surrender to any foe, no matter who, than take a Huguenot for our King!"

"Never yield to them, Sire," the reformers implored him. "'Tis something new for France to have the Huguenots in power, but not for England, nor for Scotland, nor for Denmark, nor for Navarre. We have as much right to govern as the Catholics. Long live Henry IV! Long live our Huguenot King!"

Badgered and pestered by every one, the King in a fury called his troops and captains together, and thus addressed them:

"Gentlemen, I have sent for you to declare in your presence that I have made up my mind not to change my religion or to repudiate my oath until I have been instructed in this matter by a religious council. It is intolerable to me, who am your King, and who grant you full liberty to worship as you will, to see any and every nonentity among you trying to win me over to his paltry ideas. There is nothing I desire more than to see such people quit my army. I would liefer have a hundred good, loyal Frenchmen, than two hundred such nincompoops, for I know that God is on the side of honest men."

The day after he had delivered himself of this resounding declaration, the royal army, which had numbered forty thousand men, was brought down to eighteen thousand.

Retreat became an imperative necessity. The Parisians were lighting bonfires in the city to celebrate the death of Sardanapalus. Secret societies were formed whose members bound themselves by the most terrible oaths to exterminate this Huguenot who aspired to be King. The Catholics summoned the Spaniards to their aid. Henry IV pushed on into Normandy in order to join up with the troops that his ally, Elizabeth of England, had pledged her word to send him.

The Parisians proclaimed old Cardinal de Bourbon King, that old phantom of an uncle who had united Navarre and Margot in

the bonds of matrimony. Navarre took him prisoner and clapped him into the Castle of Fontenay-le-Comte.

"My friends," said Henry with a kindly smile, when he rode into Dieppe, "I'll have no ceremony. All I ask is your good will, good bread, good wine and a cheery look from mine host."

In order to make a suitable entry into the port, where he intended to await the arrival of the English reinforcements, he had arrayed himself in the violet robe of Henry III, which had been cut down to fit him. But despite this royal garb you would never have taken him for the King of France. He had no majesty.

THE ABBESSES

AT the Convent of Montmartre the nuns' cells, filled with sunlight and lovers' sighs, opened out on to the garden loud with the humming of bees.

The headquarters of Henry IV, now laying siege to Paris, was in the apartments of the Abbess, and the Abbess had flung her Benedictine habit to the winds. For many of these women condemned to a forced seclusion, shut up in convents owing to the greed and selfishness of their families, the war afforded a way back to life itself.

Enraged at having found no one to take them, the old doorkeepers rang the bells for the offices, hung on to the bells, shouted curses on the couples who were too busily occupied to hear them.

Henry IV had a fancy for this sort of love-making. Years of repentance mingled with sighs of delight were a new dish for him. These women who damned themselves for pleasure were an inspiration for him.

In the cool parlour the King's *valet de chambre* was playing some Gascon dances on the lute, and the grave Sully, all covered with glorious wounds, was footing it all by himself, homesick, yet devil-may-care.

Chicot, squatting on the floor, was clapping his hands with glee. Sully stopped short, drew forth a paper from his pocket, and, in a stern voice, read as follows:

"The holy virgins consecrated to God whom that stinking goat and his followers have corrupted and defiled. . . . That's the sort of thing they're publishing in Paris, Chicot. You'll all of you be damned."

"Nay, fair sir, 'tis the habit makes the nun, and we always remove the habit."

Sully went on with his dance. A noble advanced, mopping his

brow, for the July sun was beating pitilessly down on the slopes of Montmartre.

"Lo!" cried the Jester, "see where he comes. My Lord of La Varenne, grand pimp of the realmless King, penniless leader and wifeless husband. Fury! Fury! There, tyrant, there! Hark! hark!"

"Your most humble servant, Monsieur de Chicot."

"Hast come with some fresh piece of skirt?"

"Perhaps. There's plenty of that in Paris. You can get the pick of the market for a piece of bread."

"Nay, tell me, Varenne, what is it makes our master go flitting from flower to flower like this? After all, he's no great leveller of timber, is he?"

"That's how it is he's always a cuckold."

"What happened to that pretty little bit Fanuche that you trotted out for him a little while ago?"

"By my faith, I had sworn she was a virgin, knowing what a taste he had for being first in the field. He soon perceived that the track was well trodden, and began to whistle. 'Wherefore do you whistle, Sire?' enquired my bogus maiden. 'I'm calling those who've been this way before, my pet,' replied our hot-head. 'Push on! Push on! You'll catch them up!' said the girl swooningly.

"All the same, he was pretty well satisfied with her. . . . Sh! . . ."

There came a deafening roar from six guns that had been stationed on the ramparts. When the smoke that blotted out Paris had cleared away, Henry IV was seen standing close to his companions, looking surlily down on the capital which refused to surrender. The whole city had gone mad. The inhabitants had eaten horses, dogs, cats, rats. Fifty thousand poor folk had died of starvation. But, behind closed doors, the Catholic leaders had all the wine and victuals they required.

A captain brought in a starveling prisoner, a little suburban working man, all cock-o'-hoop and with plenty of talk.

"What are they saying in Paris?" asked the King uncereemoniously.

"They say they'll soon have that fox of a heretic in an iron cage, and that anyone that likes can have a hair from his brush."

"Would you know that fox you talk of if you saw him?"

"No, because if I did, I would kill him."

"Well, here he is—me!"

Scared out of his wits, the man dropped on his knees.

"Arise, depart in peace. You are free to go."

Since the death of Henry III, two years before, the crownless King, the penniless general, the wifeless husband, as he called himself, had been fighting with his customary readiness and courage against heavy odds, capturing towns, covering a great deal of ground, getting a little money to pay his men from his rich prisoners, but still making precious little headway.

Wiry of limb and tanned of skin, sleeping on straw, or in the trenches, spending whole days in the saddle, munching his food as he marched along, he had an eye to everything, organised a field-ambulance service, and took his turn with the sentries. Above all, his fund of gaiety was inexhaustible and put every one in good heart.

The Generalissimo of the forces of the League, the Duc de Mayenne, who aspired to the crown of France, spent more time eating than Navarre did sleeping. He had put on so much fat that a piece had to be scooped out of the table to accommodate his paunch, and his horses crumpled under him.

Always on the alert, Henry IV, who "hadn't enough fat on him to baste a lark," was continually taking him unawares (although the pot-bellied duke was supposed to be the pursuer), harassing him, taking all the breath out of him, and forcing him to headlong and calamitous retreats.

He barred the way to Argues and put his army to rout. After which, rich with the spoils of victory, the conqueror arrived before Paris, which he could not take for lack of men.

He fell back on Normandy. Having resolved to bring about a great battle which should place the whole of this rich province in

his power, he summoned his captains, who had been dotted about in various strategic positions, to meet him in conference.

"To horse! I intend to see what sort of skin these Normandy geese have on them. Come straight to Alençon!"

On the morning of the 14th March, at Ivry, after spending some time in prayer, he fixed a great white plume on his horse's head, and another on his helmet, shouting to his troops, all eager for the fray:

"My friends, if your banners go under, rally to my white plume. You will find it ever on the path that leads to honour and to victory!"

The soldiers of the League, their cloaks a-glitter with gold and tinsel, far outnumbered them, but they were encumbered with impedimenta. The soldiers of Navarre were clad in steel.

Henry IV was the first to fling himself into the fight at the head of his men. When victory was assured, there were some moments of anxiety in his army, for he was nowhere to be seen. At last they caught sight of him, issuing from the *mêlée* covered with blood, but safe and sound. Thereupon the whole field resounded with a mighty shout of "Long live the King!"

But already Navarre was in hot pursuit of the fleeing foe. Seizing a flag, he shouted in a voice that rang out clear above the tumult and clatter of the galloping steeds, "Spare the Frenchmen!" For the army of the League was composed almost entirely of foreigners.

By this overwhelming victory, Navarre became master of the whole of Normandy. He sternly forbade his troops to indulge in violence or rapine. But he levied taxes on the inhabitants, and this without the aid of the valiant Sully who, severely wounded by a pistol-shot and covered with sword-cuts, was away nursing himself at Rosny.

When evening came, after these fierce encounters, in which Henry had seemed to bear a charmed life, he went to see how it fared with his wounded companions, and the tears glistened in his blue eyes. Even those who were mortally wounded cried "God save our King!" with their dying breath.

One of the bravest among them, who had had a sword-cut across the mouth and who was going to have part of his tongue cut away, still managed to say:

"There'll be enough of it left for me to cry 'Long live the King!' when we get into Paris again."

For Paris is the heart of France, and a King is not a King until he can call Paris his own.

Alas, to bring these stubborn Parisians to heel, proclamations and attacks alike were useless. They would have to be starved out.

The sermons and processions with which their leaders, most of whom had sold themselves to Spain, regaled them day and night, were a sorry substitute for bread. At the moment, they were feeding on candles and rats. The mill-wheels on the Seine were turning to grind up the bones that were dug up in the Cimetière des Innocents, and the unhappy wretches who battered on this horrible meal, perished on the spot. Infants died at the breast, and mothers devoured the tiny corpses. . . .

Henry promised them bread, promised them a free pardon, and swore that he would go into the question of his religion when Paris had acknowledged him as King. The masses began to look askance at these Spaniards who were defending them. With their dark-skinned women and children trailing about behind them, they looked like devils, but devils that ate their share of victuals.

Stirred by an immense pity for them, Henry IV gave permission to those who so desired, to come forth and gather grass from the moat. On the 24th July he allowed three thousand aged folk and children, "useless mouths," to come out for good. The long and miserable procession trailed along by the river and came upon the King's encampment. He took compassion on them and saw to it that they satisfied their hunger at last.

"I would almost rather give up Paris altogether than have it ruined and ravaged by the death of so many people," said the King to himself as he gazed on the heartrending scene.

The Queen of England spoke roundly to her ally. Was he making war, or was he not? Not only now, but at Ivry, he had shown

far too much consideration to his worst enemies. Why this untimely humanitarianism, which threatened to destroy the fruits of victory?

"Ah, Madame," he replied, "but I cannot reign over a nation of dead men."

Spanish reinforcements, fresh and well-equipped, arrived from Flanders. Well paid and well officered, they gave this leader of unpaid levies something to think about. Moreover, the conquered province was beginning to rear its head against the heretic King. He had to send back some of his captains in a hurry, in order to check the revolt.

Then for the third time Henry IV raised the siege of Paris. He fought a few unlucky engagements, got slightly wounded and began to think his good fortune was deserting him.

The King of Spain, believing himself victorious and seeing that the poor unfortunate Cardinal de Bourbon, whom the Parisians had acclaimed their sovereign, was dying of stone in prison, now talked of putting his daughter, Catherine's granddaughter, on the throne of France. He would marry her to the young Duke of Guise, who had escaped from the bondage in which he had been held ever since his father's assassination.

Never wearying of the fight, never abandoning hope, the royal knight-errant, Henry IV, took up his winter quarters in Picardy.

Having tired of the Abbess of Montmartre, the King laid siege, but in vain, to a fair and noble dame, Madame de la Roche-Guyon.

His old Squire of the Buttery, La Varenne, who fulfilled the office of go-between, got more from carrying chicken to the recalcitrant one than from putting them on the spit.

Alas, neither love nor death has any respect for the name of King.

"I am too lowly to be your wife, too proud to be your mistress."

It was clear that, ever since Ivry, his luck had been grievously to seek.

He fell back on a young nun of Lonchamp, called Catherine de

Verdun, to whom he gave the priory of Vernon so that he might have her near him. But she, in turn, gave him a disease which the gentlemen of the medical profession aggravated to such an extent that it was thought he would never be the father of another child.

Desperately, the King hammered away at the Spaniards, but small success attended his efforts. His outward show of good humour cloaked an anxiety that nothing could dispel. As he refused to put the country to ransom, his finances presented a grave problem. All the same he contrived to joke about his trouble. He called it his "Madame Dapple-Grey."

"Monsieur de Sully, I want to tell you about the state to which I am reduced. I haven't, so to speak, got a horse to fight on, nor a suit of armour fit to wear. My shirts are all in rags, my doublets out at elbows, my stock-pot is often empty and, the last two days, I've been dining and supping with this body and that, since my purveyors have had no pay these six months past."

GABRIELLE D'ESTRÉES

A HEAVY mist hung low upon the ground and the camp was settling down to sleep. The King, still booted and spurred, was passing leisurely along from tent to tent, exchanging a jest or two with his soldiers, good fellows all, but famished and in tatters.

The chill November wind was soughing in the branches; a little rivulet hard by whispered softly amid the herbage.

Deep in thought, the King at last sought his own quarters. A small faggot was burning in the middle of the tent. Henry was restless and his slumbers were fitful. What was he going to do with himself through those long hours of semi-darkness, with the moon already up and winking an eye at him through the clouds? His hot blood was making summer in his veins. For another fortnight the doctors had ordered him to be temperate in all things. At last he sat down at his little camp-table in front of the crackling fire, and indited a letter to one of his captains, who had just retaken Corbeil and Lagny from the Spaniards.

“Your victories prevent me from sleeping, as the victories of Miltiades and Themistocles did of old. Thus, Givrey, is the toll of your vanity paid to God.”

Then, trimming his quill anew, he pondered what news he could impart to Corisande, the devoted, generous-hearted friend whom he always held in honour. She stood by him in his darkest hours, in his days of high adventure, when the fight was thickest, when his hopes ran low, in his moments of enthusiasm, in his hours of blank despair. But all those virtues, all those moral beauties and lofty memories, could not prevent the vandal years from taking their toll of her. For time, alas, had left a deeper trace on the sensitive, delicate features of the Beloved than on the tanned hide of the warrior. The days of enchantment were past and gone.

Bending down, he picked up a log to throw on the fire, and dandled it on his knee a moment, as if it had been a woman.

Heigho! How was he to while away these heavy hours? Those cushions, those rugs, the warmth of that genial fire. . . . Truly, winter is the time for love-making, at least for men. His enforced continence awoke in him some strange hallucinations. In the eddying wreaths of smoke which curled up from the brazier he seemed to discern a female form, lissom yet firm, plump and sweet-savoured and crowned with a bewitching face. He suffered his thoughts to wander. Suddenly a sadness fell upon him, all alone as he was, with no woman to lend substance to his dream, to appease his longing.

Chicot, though in merry pin, could not chase his gloom away. Even *The Tale of the Saucy Chambermaids*, and *The Advice to a Bride on her Wedding Night*, both new-minted from Paris, failed to arouse his mirth. The Jester sat him down on his haunches and hummed his old familiar tune.

"Henry, you'll have to go and kiss the Pope's toe, if it's a king you fain would be."

In came a captain with a letter addressed to the King of Spain, which they had just discovered on a spy:

"The Man of Navarre has got plenty of courage. He's a soldier, but he has no military discipline. He's more like the leader of a horde of rough-riders and outlaws than the general of an army. He is open-handed, agreeable, rather over-fond of chaff and mockery. Although he makes out that he forgets insults, he remembers them perfectly well. He is much addicted to carnal pleasures, but he doesn't let them get the better of him and contrives to combine them with his soldiering."

"Aha! So truths are cheap to-night!"

He yawned from very boredom, while they were laying the supper-table.

"Bring me the wittiest clown in the village," he said. "I want him to amuse me while I'm eating."



GABRIELLE D'ESTRÉES IN HER BATH

Presently a peasant-fellow, with a merry twinkle in his eye, was ushered in.

"Sit down there, opposite me. What's your name?"

"Trencher, Sire."

"And, marry, what's the difference 'twixt Trencher and Wencher?"

"There's naught but the table between them," retorted the peasant with a knowing wink.

"Shrewdly thrust, in good sooth," cried the King with a laugh. "I little thought to find so great a wit in so small a village."

He felt in his pockets, he rummaged in his chest. There was nothing to be found. Then, pulling off a silver tassel that adorned the costume he had inherited from Henry III, he tossed it to the peasant, who was overwhelmed at the honour.

No sooner had the man departed than his melancholy returned.

"Send someone for my chief squire, Monsieur de Bellegarde."

Now Monsieur de Bellegarde was a fine figure of a man, a man of pleasant discourse, a little loose in his talk, maybe, but a wit and very choice in his manners; in short, a delightful rogue who had sipped honey from every flower in the garden. His beauty had greatly advanced him in the favour of the late King.

He heralded his coming with a song, for he had an engaging voice.

"Quand elle aurait suivi le camp à la Rochelle
S'elle a force ducats, elle est toujours pucelle. . . ."

Bellegarde was a great hand at the dice-board, and the King would have staked his shirt, if he had had a presentable one.

They played; the King yawned as though his jaw would break.

"What's the time, Bellegarde?"

"Nine o'clock, Sire."

"Is that all! 'Sdeath, I don't know what's wrong, but it seems to me that the hours drag on no faster than a snail. I feel desperately weary of things."

"Your Majesty should take a little sleep."

"My Majesty can't sleep in a bed by himself."

"Well then, are there no wenches in the place?"

"You know, or you ought to, that the doctors have put their foot down on that, for the time being."

"Ah, true. I'd forgotten that that delightful creature, the Abbess of Vernon, had bestowed on you a forget-me-not that was not altogether of the pleasantest."

"You're not having the best of luck with the dice to-night, gossip. You must be lucky in your love-making. Tell me about it."

"Ah, Sire, I've got the loveliest mistress in the world—Gabrielle d'Estrées. Just twenty. Her complexion outrivals the snow and the roses; her eyes, the heavens. Her eyebrows are black and arched like wings. A little nose—you'd like to eat it—lips like rubies, and a neck like pure and polished ivory."

"Sblood. She must be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. And where does she live, this *rara avis*?"

"At the Château de Cœuvres, some few miles from here, under the tutelage of an indulgent aunt who was also a bit of a rake in her time," was the squire's unguarded reply.

"He's a good judge of women, is Bellegarde," said the King to himself again and again that night. "I've a very good mind to go and have a look at the paragon myself."

The fire thus kindled had got hold on him. Up he got and finished off his letter to Corisande with the usual formula: "I kiss your feet a million times," but it was a pair of little unknown feet that would keep tripping along before his eyes.

The morning cocks began to crow. The rosy glow of dawn came stealing in beneath the tent. The King called out for La Varenne.

"That peasant fellow that came here yesterday, when I was at dinner, was about my build. Go and get hold of his clothes for me."

He waited for the early November twilight to fall before he set out. The whole of the enemy's army lay between him and the

Château de Cœuvres. But who would recognise the King in this grey-bearded peasant trudging along with a bundle of hay on his back?

Soaked through, chilled to the bone, he went labouring on through flooded fields, and copses swarming with Spaniards, to the warm nest where dwelt the lovely girl. A dozen times he was nearly caught. At last, as night was falling, he came in sight of Cœuvres. The evening mist lay like a fairy veil over woodland and castle. The sound of the Angelus floated down from a viewless sky.

"Who goes there?" "Who goes there?" rapped out the sentries behind this drifting vapour.

"The King of France!" answered a mud-begrimed peasant.

When he had made himself known, he was ushered into the great hall. The most charming being imaginable advanced to greet him; wonderfully beautiful, very fair of skin, with big blue eyes, flesh like milk, abounding in dimples, a little crimson, cushiony mouth. In short, Venus herself, in person.

Henry, pale, thunderstruck, suffered the young woman, who was no less overwhelmed, to go on kneeling.

"What!" she said to herself, "is *this* the famous King, so brave, so bold and so renowned a lover? Is *this* a King?"

A little adorable, but involuntary, pout made her steady countenance the more bewitching. She remembered that his men—with a freedom that was lacking in respect but certainly not in love—dubbed him—this young sovereign of thirty-eight—*Greybeard*!

Quite enslaved, the King seemed as if he would never grow weary of admiring her. Gabrielle, reserved and apprehensive of she knew not what, soon took her leave. What stories had she not heard tell of Henry's ways with women! She loved Bellegarde, and had never for a moment doubted that, when peace came, she and he would wed. But now, something plucked at her heart, and she felt a vague foreboding of some hindrance to the fulfilment of her affections.

Her aunt, Madame de Sourdis, the one-time mistress of Che-

verny, Catherine's former chancellor, was alive to all the advantages that might accrue to the family if the King were to fall in love with Gabrielle. Far on into the silence of the night she held converse with the royal gallant, piling lie upon lie, treason upon treason, and when next day, at dawn, Henry started out for his camp again, the prospect of soon having for his own so exquisite a portion, opened out to his eyes a radiant vista of delight.

The Siege of Chartres kept him busy all the winter. Instead of giving his nights to love, he spent them mounting guard with a body of horse a hundred strong. And when he came in from the trenches, as the day began to break, he would set out, nothing wearied, for the chase.

When on the 10th April the town at last surrendered, the King took melancholy toll of all the men that he had lost. One thousand two hundred in all, and eight brigadier-generals.

The next thing he did was to appoint M. de Sourdis, Gabrielle's uncle, governor of this costly prize.

Meanwhile the Spaniards were pushing on into Normandy. Always in the forefront of the fight, the bullets whistling about his ears, the King attacked them unceasingly. Sully, frowning on these temerarious deeds, openly expressed his disapproval.

"Sire," said he, "there is nothing so imprudent and so useless as for a soldier to take the offensive with insufficient forces."

"That," replied the King, "is the sort of thing folk say when they're afraid. I should not have expected it from you."

Not long afterwards he narrowly escaped being taken prisoner. As he was making good his escape he was hit in the side by a bullet from an arquebus. Its force, however, was broken by the pommel of the saddle, and the wound, though painful, was not a serious one.

THE KING IS JEALOUS

“I KNOW not with what magic you have wrought, heart of my heart, but I never endured other severances with half the impatience the present one inflicts on me. Already it seems an age since I departed from you. No need for you to beg me to return. Every artery, every muscle in my body keeps telling me, every moment, of the bliss of beholding you and of the bitterness of separation. Believe me, my beloved Queen, never did love visit me so fiercely as it does this very hour.”

“The pain I feel at getting no news from you continues still. I am sending La Fon to you post-haste for I fear some accident must have befallen you. Send him back at once, dear love, I implore you. Believe me, my lovely angel, when I say that I rate the possession of your good graces above the glory of a dozen battles. Consider it a jewel in your crown that you have vanquished me, who never was completely conquered save by you.”

“I have only two hundred horse, and the enemy have three hundred, but I am going to trail my coat in front of them to see if they are inclined to fight, and I’ll let off a shot for the love of you.”

“My sweetest love, to-morrow I shall be showering kisses by the million on those beautiful hand. Already the burdens of my troubles grows lighter now that a happiness I hold as dear as life will soon be mine. But if you are a single day later than you say, ’twill be the death of me.

“Never hath absence been more grievous to me than this. To spend the month of April far from one’s beloved, ’tis not to live at all.”

With the song of the lark, the King took farewell of Gabrielle, leaving her weary and drenched with sleep, nestling down half-hidden from view amid the tumbled pillows.

His quick, firm step echoed a second or two along the empty corridors of the Château de Compiègne. Soon after, the sound of horses at the gallop grew fainter and more faint, and finally died away into silence.

Gabrielle, wide awake, promptly rose, made herself pretty, and went back to bed again. The door opened cautiously and revealed the countenance of Bellegarde, pilferer of love's delights.

"My darling one. . . ."

"You're sure he's gone?"

"He's a good ten miles on the Villers-Cotterets road by now."

"Oh, I'm scared. . . ."

"It suits you."

"And you, aren't you afraid?"

"No, my love, I like it all the better. Pleasure grows with peril. The risk of being caught gives a tang to the sauce, as my wise friend Montaigne truly remarks. Tell us we mustn't have a thing, and we long for it the more. . . . Kiss me then, my sweet, forbidden fruit."

"But if he catches us?"

"Well, he'll only laugh. He always laughs at everything."

"He'd kill you."

"Ah, I'm dead already!" he cried, flinging himself on the bed.

"God forgive me, haven't I got right on my side? I belonged to you. I had plighted you my troth. Then he came, and because he's lord and master, I've got to force my heart, and my body to . . . But I love you. . . . My family flung me into his arms, and you forsook me. . . ."

"What else could I do?"

"You could have run away with me."

"Madame, I have been through hell, and that you know. But does one disobey the King of France?"

"King of France? But he is *not* the King of France."

"Not yet, but he soon will be. Thanks to what you've been telling him, he is going to abjure. He'll be crowned before the year is

out. The day will come when, as I fall on my knees before you, my own crowned Queen, you will say to me: 'Well done, my good and faithful servant!'

"Never! Never!"

"Well, my beloved, are we going to be talking of him all the time? Let's love one another."

"Hark . . . there's someone coming!"

"No, no. It's just fear that makes you think you hear things. Calm yourself, my sweetest angel."

Her waiting-woman, who was in her confidence, rushed in, all dishevelled, like a whirlwind.

"Madame, the King!"

"Don't lose your head like this, my good woman. Shut the door and take the key, and get into bed again. By the time they've found you, I shall be well away."

Snatching up his russet doublet, he vanished into the little room, through the door at the foot of the bed.

The King rattled violently at the door.

"The key, *Ventre-Saint-Gris*! Let me have the key, will you?"

"Oh, Sire," said a quaking voice, "I thought you had gone, and I dropped off to sleep again. . . . Here is the key. . . ."

"Ah, you thought I had gone, did you?" he cried, rushing into the room, sword in hand.

Pretending to be just waking up, Gabrielle began to stretch her limbs voluptuously, in a way that always seriously disturbed his peace of mind. With well-feigned surprise she surveyed the King's bristling hair and flaming eyes.

"What is the matter? You alarm me, Sire."

All the time she was speaking, she was listening in an agony of fear. A dull thud on the grass outside told her that her lover had jumped clear. Bellegarde knew all there was to know about jumping out of women's bedroom windows, scaling roofs and skimming along the tiles. He was a past-master in all the feats of the accomplished philanderer.

Gabrielle burst out laughing.

"I'm dead with fright. Against whom does the All-bravest meditate war?"

"Madame, you know that better than I do."

"I? Tell me, my bonny knight, has the fever got hold of you that you talk thus wildly?"

With lowering brows he paced about the room, hot on the trail of the irresistible and cynical Bellegarde. And yet here was Gabrielle, looking as fresh as the morning, with her big, innocent eyes. . . . What *was* he to make of it?

Many a time and oft, since the first day, Henry, disguised and staking the crown as yet so insecurely poised on his adventurous head, had crossed the enemy lines, at the peril of his life for the sole purpose of seeing his beloved once again. He had now got the whole family on his shoulders. When he had made the uncle Governor of Chartres, the father Governor of Noyon, the brother a bishop and the aunt's lover his chancellor, Gabrielle had deigned to bestow on him a few marks of affection. Oh, nothing very remarkable, mark you, for she was of an unresponsive nature, but still he had been thankful for small mercies. She would wake up, he thought, as time went on. And so that she should not wed this handsome, far too handsome Bellegarde, who was always dangling round her, he had found a suitable husband for her, in a certain Seigneur de Liancourt who was impotent.

Despite all this, he still had a soft spot in his heart for Bellegarde. How far was this affection fated to go?

A pair of white breasts tipped with delicate pink, perfect in contour, were just visible through a cleft in her dainty chemise. The idea that a seducer's kisses had roamed about such treasures drove him into a frenzy.

"All the same," he reflected philosophically, "I took her from him, so it's fair enough that he should pluck his grapes from my vine. . . ."

But still that did not soothe him. Everywhere he went he heard that Gabrielle was deceiving him, yet when he arrived, thinking

to take her in the act, behold she was alone. What was he to make of it?

He went up to her and tried to imprison her fair head between his hands, so that he might look deep into her eyes and learn the truth. She struggled to keep him off.

"First, Sire, kiss my hand and ask my pardon!"

"No! No! No!"

"Then go away."

A little mutinous foot peeped out from under the coverlet. The King, poor fellow, bit his lip and knew not what to do.

"Will you forgive me, Gabrielle? But will you swear you are mine and mine alone?"

"I shall not answer a single word. Your doubt is an insult that I shall never forget."

"You are trying to wriggle out of it, Madame. Tell me the truth, 'yes' or 'no'."

"I am sorry for you, Henry. I, who am the Princess Constance in person, alive to everything that concerns you, heedless of all the world beside! To think that you should come to this. Oh, how miserable am I! No! No! Come not near me! Leave me to weep alone."

"I never had a word from you yesterday. It is now midday and I've heard nothing yet. This is a very different thing from being sure that I was going to see you to-night, as your words gave me to understand. When will you learn to keep your word? I don't play fast and loose like that with *my* promises. A feverish attack came on this morning. I took a dose of medicine and it has upset me completely."

"Come! Come! Come! my dearest, dearest love. Honour with your presence a man who, if he were free, would go ten thousand miles to fling himself at your feet and stay there."

"There is nothing that fosters and increases my suspicions like the way in which you treat me. What trust am I to put in an

oath that you have twice broken? You write that you will keep the promises you made me recently. It's no good saying, 'I will do.' You must say, 'I am doing.' Make up your mind then, Mistress mine, to have but one to serve you. I long so much to see you, that I would give four years of my life to behold you now, this very instant. . . ."

"You didn't expect me, then, my fair Gabrielle?"

"No, Sire, I confess I did not. . . . It's a delightful surprise. But please just go out for a moment while I put on another nightdress, have my hair done, and make myself more becoming for your pleasure."

"Madame, nothing gives me such pleasure as beauty unadorned. Nature never made you so perfectly to my taste."

"At any rate, just give me a minute, and let them change the sheets."

"No, no, my sweet. I love the perfume Nature gave you. I've ordered lunch up here and some fiddlers to fiddle to us."

Glancing into the Venetian glass, she noticed Bellegarde's sword sticking out from under the bed. Strolling nonchalantly past it, she gave it a little kick with her foot; then, pale and trembling, sat her down and faced the King.

While he was digging his teeth into a great hunk of rich veal, and making short work of milk, eggs and other adjuncts, she was toying, for appearance sake, with a tiny morsel on her plate. When they had finished, the King took a pot of jam and skittled it dexterously under the bed.

"A man must live," he said, with a knowing look. That was too much for Gabrielle. She fainted.

Je notands aussy que vous
avez espere de metre la seringue main
a ce bon uime a fin que nous en recevions
ensemble par nous & les ures apresant & as
luceny les avantages que sa promet &
cey^{te} l'indubitable & l'esperance de l'AM

▪

PART III

▪

“PARIS IS WELL WORTH A MASS”

PARIS was fast asleep when, through lashing rain and in the wan light of a March dawn, a troop of horsemen, in full fighting trim and looking like a band of conspirators, rode silently through the Porte Neuve.

A personage of high rank who had been waiting in the thick mist thrust his torch under the helmet of the leading horseman, whose down-at-heel riding-boots were shifting impatiently in his make-shift stirrups, and immediately dropped on one knee.

“Long live the King!” cried an over-zealous soldier, who was promptly silenced. Then followed a hurried colloquy conducted in a whisper.

“Monsieur de Brissac, I make you a Marshal of France.”

“May God bless Your Majesty!” murmured Brissac, the Governor of Paris, who was handing over the Capital to Henry IV in exchange for the title named, thirty thousand *livres* and a pension of thirty thousand crowns.

The troop started off again at the gallop. The Spaniards, taken by surprise, were immediately put to the sword. All round the city rode the King, setting guards at the gates, the cross-roads and the bridges. When the Parisians opened their eyes, they beheld all Paris occupied as by enchantment. They gaped about them with astonishment and shouted “Treason” as they watched the troops ride past, and the soldier-King of one-and-forty summers, hard as nails, tanned with the sun, beard, moustache and hair all grey, who, on his charger caparisoned in steel, saluted them with merry *bonhomie*.

Above the noise and tumult, the Angelus rang out.

“I give orders that all foreigners shall leave the city forthwith, without arms. No harm will be done them if they behave quietly.”

Having, as one who was master of the situation, thus ordained, Henry proceeded to Notre-Dame, where, with great reluctance, the choir chanted a *Te Deum*. A solitary bonfire, lit by order, blazed away in front of the Hôtel de Ville.

It was not a triumphal entry. . . . On the open space in front of the Cathedral, a silent crowd had slowly assembled. It was largely composed of curious women.

Oh, he was far from being the magnificent King that young girls pictured in their dreams. However, so much had been said in his disfavour that they had fancied him plainer than he really was. He might reek like a goat, but he was at all events a King who had love-affairs with women; a real man, in short. For such a long time now the sceptre had been held by a woman!

Henry IV spoke a few kindly words to every one as he passed along, and whenever he saw a pretty woman he doffed his hat to her, his black hat, with its great white plume, with a gallant air. However, no burst of applause broke through the rain which was now just starting again. And so, to liven up the drabness a little, he ordered the bells to be rung.

By two o'clock, Spaniards, Walloons, and Neapolitans were making their way out of the city.

In doublet of grey, plastered with mud, dripping with rain, the King galloped to the Porte Saint-Denis to see them go. The enemy standards did not salute him. When their Chief, the Spanish Ambassador, appeared, quite crestfallen at what had happened, Henry leaned down from his horse and said jeeringly:

"*Bon voyage*, gentlemen. My compliments to your master; but don't come back again."

He came to the Louvre, where the delegations were humbly awaiting his arrival. They brought him, by way of a gift to celebrate his happy accession, hippocras, tapers of white wax and sugar-plums. He swore that all was forgiven and forgotten and that Paris should be neither sacked nor held to ransom.

Alone with his chancellor, he murmured with a sort of savage glee:

“Am I to believe that I am where I am? The more I think of it, the more amazed I grow. . . .”

He dined in the Louvre, deserted now and desolate, more like a stable than a royal palace. The spiders had spun their webs so thick against the windows that the fading daylight could scarcely filter through, and left sinister shadows in the corners.

Eighteen years before, he had fled those old and sombre walls, haunted as they were by deeds of darkness and hung with dreadful secrets. In those days he was but a poor penniless princeling, caught in the toils of destiny, destitute of resources. And now he was the Lord’s anointed!

Through the long watches of many an anxious night, he had tried to tell himself why this fratricidal slaughter should continue. He had sought and found not. What sorrow! What suffering! What ghastly bloodshed! Those years of fury and of carnage—’twas the barbarous age come back again to France, poor France that had been so cruelly laid waste. . . . And all for some miserable dispute about the interpretation of the Gospel. . . . At least, such was the pretext.

The Catholic nobles, who had rallied to his white standard after the death of Henry III, had it in mind to abandon him. The Spaniards and the Guises were already dividing up France between them, France which they deemed at her last gasp. It was a fateful hour.

In July 1593, Henry IV made a solemn declaration:

“Gentlemen, I am not obstinate, but I have never been instructed in religion. Hitherto the only argument used to convert me has been a knife held at my throat. Send me a few bishops to instruct me, and I will see what can be done.”

In true Gascon style, he wrote to Gabrielle:

“To-morrow, Sunday, I take the perilous leap, my heart. Come early, for it seems a year already since I saw you. A million kisses on my angel’s fair hands, and on the lips of my beloved mistress.”

A suspension of hostilities was agreed upon, and, clad all in white satin, like a catechumen, the King made his submission to the Catholic Church at Saint-Denis.

Paris, France, in other words, "was well worth a Mass." So Sully assured him, and Sully remained a Protestant.

"Sire," said his old Huguenot comrades, with tears in their eyes, "we served you without bread, without pay, when our clothes were in rags and our boots let water. Look at the hardships we have been through together, the perils we have faced; and now you're going to forsake us! You always found *us* faithful; on the other side, all *they* had to offer you was death, yet it's to them you are going. We have been fighting for a thankless, godless apostate."

Ah, these men of the mountains—he longed to bang their stubborn heads together.

"But don't you see that without my conversion there would be no king nor kingdom left? I want all my subjects to enjoy the blessings of peace. I will see to your safety. I will never leave you in the lurch."

"Sire, we count on you no longer." And so they turned away. He had forsworn his faith.

Nor did he inspire any greater confidence in the Catholics. Had he not fallen away twice before? As for the people, they were not to be palmed off with the four hundred crowns, three thousand sols and three thousand loaves that had been distributed in Saint-Denis; no, not they!

After his conversion, he was solemnly crowned, by his own command, at Chartres. Rheims was in the hands of the League, and so Saint Remi's vial of holy oil had to be replaced by Saint Martin's. And as the regalia had been melted down, the crown and the sceptre were new.

But Paris had not capitulated. Henry IV waited seven months, and then he resigned himself to buying his capital from the man in command of the garrison. . . .

The King passed a feverish hand across his brow. Now there

were crowds of assiduous courtiers round his table. He was very cautious as to what he ate.

"I'm so intoxicated with joy at finding myself here," he said again and again, "that I don't know what you're saying, or what I ought to say in reply."

He took it into his head to wander alone through the awesome palace. The sinister shade of Catherine de' Medici still queened it there. In Charles IX's own room, where one night, long ago, his fate had been decided, he sat him down for a moment, for he was tired out. He had marched all night so as to get to Paris before dawn. Besides, he had been fighting now for twenty-six long years. An immense weariness weighed upon his shoulders. He was alone, now, and could lay aside his smile. He could give full rein to the melancholy to which, as his intimates knew full well, he was so often a prey. So many painful memories came thronging into his breast that night, that he scarce knew how to breathe. One by one, under his breath, he called on the dead by name. What a triumph it had been, had they been there in the flesh!

What were these mysterious sounds—the murmur of the Seine, hoarse voices of the crowd, the wind moaning in the great chimneys, the rustling of ghostly forms, the groans of murdered men—that filled these desolate apartments?

The glamour, the sickening reek of blood, the horror of that ghastly night of Saint Bartholomew came back upon him, encompassed him about and would not leave him. Doleful voices, voices that he knew, were heard above the tumult.

"Thou hast not avenged us!"

"My poor friends, it took more courage to forget the vendetta than to perpetuate it."

"Avenge us, O King! Avenge us! An eye for an eye!"

Suddenly, behind him, he heard another voice, a wheedling voice, the voice of Catherine. "My friend," she said, "at last, then, you are in my power. You are my prisoner."

A chill ran through his very marrow. There was a sound of

footsteps on the tiled floor. He sprang to his feet, sword in hand.

"Who goes there?"

"What, doesn't Your Majesty know an old friend when you see him?"

It was Sully, the wise and faithful Sully.

"What are you doing here without a light? The place is not exactly cheerful."

"Old friend, I was calling things to mind. . . ."

"Well, Your Majesty doesn't do so often, and that's a fact."

"Have I got to go and fetch you, then, every time I weep? What are people saying in the town?"

"They are calling out 'Long live the King!'"

Henry thought of all those years of agony and hardship when the people of Paris would have none of him, and burnt him in effigy.

"The populace are like an animal that you drag along by the muzzle, especially the Parisians. . . ."

Pulling himself together, he brushed away a cobweb from the window and looked out. Night had come again, and a foggy one. At the corners of the muddy streets, lights were twinkling here and there through the smoke-grimed panes of clumsy lanterns. Swine were wandering at large, thrusting their snouts into all the garbage that lay heaped up along the ruts.

"I have given an eye to everything," said the King all at once, with a sudden access of impatience. "I'm going back to Saint-Denis."

Thereat Sully put on a grim look and recited,

"Love a little, good and well,
Love too much, and go to hell."

Henry twined his fingers affectionately in his friend's.

"Can you finish up a perfect day anywhere but with your sweetheart?"

Leaving Sully to continue his grumbling, the King bounded down the stairs, all packed with soldiers, four at a time, flung himself into the saddle, and headed for Saint-Denis, where he had left his Gabrielle.

The favourite was now expecting her first child. Assured henceforth of her fidelity, Henry caused a decree of nullity to be pronounced against the unforthcoming Liancourt. It was now Gabrielle's turn to be uneasy. But after every one of his little peccadilloes he came back to her feet, more deeply in love with her than ever. He had a picture painted of them both together—she, naked, as Venus; he, fully armed, as Mars. But he had no need of a picture to remind him of his inamorata.

"I have you, painted to perfection, in my heart and in my eyes, my dearest love."

The King was no hand at versification, but love inspired him with these stanzas, which a specialist in the art touched up for him. Before long the whole Court was humming them:

"Charmante Gabrielle,
Percé de mille dards,
Quand la gloire m'appelle,
Sous les drapeaux de Mars,
Cruelle départie,
Malheureux jour!
Que ne suis-je pas sans vie
Ou sans amour!

L'amour sans nulle peine
M'a, par vos doux regards,
Comme un grand capitaine,
Mis sous ses étendards.
Cruelle départie,
Malheureux jour!
Etc. . . ."

The two lovers were nearly always together. She went with him to the chase and to the wars. During the siege of Laon, where

the King performed some prodigies of valour, Gabrielle was delivered of a son, César of Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme. Laon having been wrested from the Spaniards, the lovers returned to Paris.

The favourite was quartered near the Louvre, and with her the King spent nearly all his time. It was there that he entertained his friends. The prattle and laughter of the little one, the buxom nurses, the lovesick dogs were quite to his taste.

And Gabrielle, with her delicious, rounded figure, proverbial comforter against the winter's gloom, her throat soft and rounded as a turtle dove's, her languid gestures, her blue eyes, her slow, voluptuous glance, enchanted him as much as when he first beheld her. So proud was he of her beauty that he was constantly taking off the black satin mask which great ladies used to wear in the street, or when receiving visitors.

It was this refreshing youthfulness, this loving tenderness that would have to be brought into the gloomy old Louvre, adorned now with scutcheons bearing the united arms of France and Navarre, if the dread phantoms that haunted it were to be put to flight. But that he dared not do, for fear of running counter to the people, who were still mistrustful, still waiting to see how he would comport himself before declaring themselves his friends.

Quick, let the promise of happier days to come efface the memory of the tragic past!

The King used every possible endeavour to repair the ravages inflicted on the country by forty years of civil strife. But how difficult it is to persuade the people for their good. It was sometimes so painful that the royal heart was filled to overflowing with bitterness and indignation.

The King was a prey to constant attacks of fever. For several weeks erysipelas disfigured his countenance; he suffered, too, from the effects of the many wounds he had received in his long succession of campaigns.

With his people clamouring for food, his resources at an end, his empty treasury, his foreign debts and the indignities he had to en-

dure at the hands of the great feudal lords, he at last grew sick at heart. To his fair mistress, as she sat upon his knee and inclined a tender ear to what he had to say, he retailed the shameful tricks of grasping financiers, the odious haggling of nobles and municipalities, and exclaimed at last, in tones of bitter resentment:

"They have not *given* me back my kingdom, they've made me *buy* it."

Sully, to whom the supreme direction of the country's finances was now entrusted, jealously hoarded the crown pieces he had scraped together in the bottom of his money chests, and it was like getting blood out of a stone to make him provide the wherewithal to settle these sordid transactions. He would much rather have spent the money on cannon.

"It is stupid of you to put all these obstacles in the way," the King wrote him on one occasion. "Don't be quite so fond of playing the cautious steward, hanging on to the money like this. We intend to pay for the goods delivered to us, for it is certain that, if we had to fight for them, they would cost us ten times more."

If only the people who growled and grumbled at the royal expenditure could have read some of the secret documents; if only they had known the price which the long-suffering but indignant Henry paid for the loyalty and fidelity of his noble subjects . . .

People were greatly touched at the emotion displayed by the young Duke of Guise, the son of Le Balafré who had been murdered at Blois, the darling of the Parisians, who were inconsolable at not having him for their King. This same Duke had just been to take the oath of fealty.

Henry slapped him on the back, saying, "Welcome, Coz. You'll find you've done yourself no harm by coming here to see me. I hope to give you a better time of it than you've been having lately where you are."

The young prince tried to say something in reply, but his emotion was so great that he could not speak.

"Cousin," said the King, with a kindly laugh, "you're not much of a speaker; no more am I. I know what you want to say; you can

put the whole thing in a nutshell. We are all liable to kick over the traces when we are young. I've forgotten the whole thing; don't let's dig it up again. Since you acknowledge me your King, I will be a father to you."

But little did people know the price the King had paid for this young man's allegiance, to wit, four hundred thousand crowns, the Governorship of Provence, and the title of Admiral of the Levantine Seas.

And in the breathing-space between two such deals in forts, or consciences, did he sit quietly on his throne or lie in the arms of his inamorata? Not a bit of it! He must needs be up in the saddle again and off to rout the Spaniards out of the east and north, where they were still playing the devil, off to clap the extinguisher on the last remnants of the League and their commander, the pot-bellied Duke of Mayenne.

The foe suffered from no lack of men or money; the Indian fleet sailed home with thirty-two millions in gold, while poor Henry couldn't scrape up enough to feed his horses.

"How many shirts have I got?" he asked his *valet de chambre*.

"A dozen, Sire; but a good many of them want mending."

"And handkerchiefs—I've eight, haven't I?"

"At the moment, Sire, only five."

"Well anyhow, gentlemen, treat me as well as you treat the monks," he said one day to his well-fed members of Parliament. "It's not every day that I get enough to fill my belly, and as for my clothes, Monsieur le Président, look how I have to go about." And spinning round on his toes he displayed the holes in his doublet and his old, patched grey breeches.

To fight the Spanish invader, a national object if ever there was one, the *Chambre des Comptes* put down, not money—they had paid up lavishly enough to finance the wars of religion—but remonstrances in connection with the means test, and complained particularly because Sully, now the financial dictator of the country, went for his money where he knew he would find it, and was abolishing a large number of treasuryships.

"Of course, I know perfectly well," was Henry's ironic reply to the malcontents, "that new regulations are always unpopular. I am just as sorry as you are about it all. But when you saw what I was driving at, you should have gone straight ahead and not have dillied and dallied over mere formalities, as if there hadn't been a war on. For years now I have kept my men-at-arms going without money. How I have done it is a miracle, but it has ruined the poor fellows; they are at the end of their tether. I am compelled, then, to use what means I have. You said that you were aware of the extent of my necessities, but you didn't raise a finger to help me out of them, let alone furnishing money for my armies. If you, each of you, gave me two or three thousand crowns apiece, or authorised me to impound your salaries or the salaries of the country's treasurers, I should be able to dispense with these edicts. . . . But you insist on being well paid yourselves, and imagine you've done wonders when you have presented me with a few imposing remonstrances full of eloquent, high-sounding phrases. And then you go away home and make yourselves snug and arrange everything to suit your own convenience."

Three months later, Parliament again defaulted, and the Spaniards seized the opportunity to invade the northern districts and to bring about a rising in Brittany, Provence, Lyonnais and Burgundy. So it was that Parliament received from their King of Shreds and Patches, who was eager to hasten to the frontier, the following furious reprimand:

"I'm off to join my army, and I am about as ill-equipped as ever prince could be. For three months I've been kept kicking my heels about in this place because you would keep putting things off. You will soon see how our cause has suffered. I put you back in your houses, when you were pigging it in little dirty, dingy rooms. Now I enjoin you to attend to your responsibilities, to be as careful of the interests of the people as a whole as you are of the things that concern yourselves in particular. I don't say one thing and mean another. What I say with my tongue, I mean in my heart. . . . At the present moment I've got three hostile armies in my kingdom. God

put the whole thing in a nutshell. We are all liable to kick over the traces when we are young. I've forgotten the whole thing; don't let's dig it up again. Since you acknowledge me your King, I will be a father to you."

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will help me drive them out, and when I have done so, I will come back again and hold my Bed of Justice."

Vaulting into the saddle, Henry galloped all the way to Dijon where his lieutenant, the Baron de Biron, was engaged in repelling the invaders. The bulk of the enemy's forces had been located in the neighbourhood of Fontaine-Française. Thither the King hastened with fifteen hundred lances and arquebuses. There he found the Spaniards in much greater force and in much better trim than he expected. But it never entered his head to avoid a battle. With God's good help he would charge and rout them. His cue was to deceive the enemy, to make up in daring what he lacked in numbers. Once more into the breach, then, at the head of his dashing blades. And so the King of France, protected merely by a small breastplate, armed only with his massy sword, thrust boldly on into the Spanish lines, putting yet again his life in direst peril, laying about him with a will. He broke the enemy's line, fell back again a space to take a better leap, called on his followers by their Christian names or nicknames, and with mad, merry courage, carved his way to victory.

That night, his white plume stained with the blood of his vanquished foes, he wrote off in joyful vein as follows:

"You will learn, from the speech I am sending you, how my first meeting with the Constable of Castille went off. He is waiting for reinforcements before coming back to renew the acquaintance. But if he and his men don't put up a better fight next time, I shall hope to give them a sounder drubbing than I did before."

To Harambure, his old companion-in-arms, who had lost an eye in his service, he wrote in this jocular strain:

"Harambure, you can curse your unlucky stars that you weren't with me in the fight that we've just had. We went at it like madmen. I will tell you all the details when I see you. Come and join me as soon as possible. Make haste, I've need of you. Good-bye, old One Eye."

After fighting this battle, in which the enemy outnumbered them by six to one, the French Army penetrated into Franche-Comté and then pushed on towards Lyons. On entering that city, Henry gave orders for a general truce which he hoped would be the prelude to a final cessation of hostilities.

For, in September 1595, the Pope had at last removed his ban of excommunication. The complexion of things was undergoing an entire change. The members of the League had no longer any valid pretext for continuing the struggle. The Duke of Mayenne begged for a free pardon—with the Governorship of Burgundy, the payment of his debts, and three hundred thousand crowns thrown in.

To bring peace to his distracted kingdom, Henry would have promised a great deal more than that.

While he still had work on hand in Burgundy, word was brought to him that the Spaniards had taken Cambrai. Mounting his horse he said, "I am resolved, no matter what the cost, to relieve Cambrai, or to die in the attempt."

He called his followers and galloped away to the north. That night, as he was changing horses at Amiens, someone came and delivered an address:

"O King benign, most clement and most great . . ." began the spokesman.

"And you may add, 'most weary,' " the poor King broke in, in desperation. "In truth," said he, pointing to his grey locks, "'tis the speeches that have been fired off at me since I succeeded to the Crown that have turned my hair white like this."

Before he got to Cambrai melancholy news was brought to him. Calais had fallen.

That was the signal for the enemy to advance on Paris. When it became known that Amiens had fallen, the men of Normandy decided to enlist, and the Parisians raised a regiment. It was high time.

By forced marches, Henry got to Arras, where he attempted a surprise attack with the idea of drawing the Spaniards thither. It failed.

He fell sick and had to return to Beauvais to snatch a few days' rest. Though he could hardly keep himself in the saddle, haggard and tired out, on a tired horse, he went straight off to shake up his incorrigible Parliament, which was always doing something to put a spoke in his wheel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is not merely on account of my health that I have come back from the Picardy front. I have come also to urge you, one and all, to make provision for the obvious requirements of the situation. I come to ask succour of you for the men I have left behind me at the front, where they are fighting night and day, wearing out their lives so that yours may be passed in tranquillity. I beg of you that you will take counsel together for, if I am given an army, I will gladly devote my life to the task of preserving and restoring the country. If not, then there will be no alternative for me, but to seek an occasion to quit this life with honour."

To this moving appeal, the Parliament replied with—words!

A month went by. The soldiers cried out that they were starving. Henry IV rose from his bed, with the fever still upon him, and once more confronted the circumlocutionists.

"I am compelled to come here by your procrastination, your stubbornness and your disobedience, and still more by solicitude for the welfare of the State, the grave peril of which I made clear to you without, however, stirring you to action."

This time, driven beyond endurance, he gave his orders through the mouth of his Chancellor, what time he hastened back to Amiens, where he flung himself again into the fight. Fortunately the love his soldiers bore him not only brought comfort to his heart but shielded him from the countless perils to which he so recklessly exposed himself.

One day he was riding round examining the ramparts of the besieged city, when a Gascon soldier, who had remained a prisoner in the enemy's hands, shouted at him in *patois* from the top of a tower:

"Hi there! You miller of Barbaste, look to yourself. The place is going to blow up!"

The King clapped spurs into his horse and the animal bounded away from the spot which, a moment later, was shattered by a mine.

Gabrielle was with him now. She did not feel safe in Paris with her lover so far away. And funds were lacking, as usual. Report had it that he was lavishing money with his mistress on fêtes and ballets. Once more he returned to the charge:

"Gentlemen, you say that, where I am, all goes well. God be praised, that is true. But I can't be everywhere. . . . You say that I take too many risks. It's not because I want to, but because I must, for where I go not myself, the others do not follow. As they are all volunteers, I cannot force them. If I had the money to pay for regular fighting men, I should have troops that I could order to take risks, and I should not go myself. . . . Money, then, I must have, and that fact could not be stated more clearly than in the edicts you have got to put through to-morrow. And if people raise any difficulties, tell them that it is their fault that I have to put my life in jeopardy. Money, and nothing else, is what I want. And I don't want it for masques and balls. I want it in order to drive the enemy back to his own country. . . . All will be well, if only I have money. . . ."

Parliament held some tumultuous sittings. In tones of mingled rage and sorrow the King wrote off to Montmorency, the Constable:

"My good friend, I am deeply grieved that these Parliamentary gentlemen have again been playing the fool. Since I've got to go myself, go I will. I'd ten times rather go than leave France to her fate. Tell the Chancellor to get ready what he will have to say. So far as I am concerned, I am quite prepared. Good night, *mon compère*."

Henry recaptured Amiens. Wild with joy, he sent a messenger to the brave Crillon, who was fighting elsewhere.

"My trusty Crillon," he wrote, "curse yourself for not being

here with me last Monday. You never saw anything finer in your life."

Peace came at last. The King signed a treaty with Spain, the Treaty of Vervins, the provisions of which were definitely favourable to France.

So now at last the wheat could swell and ripen to gold beneath the rays of God's good sun. No Spanish troopers, no churlish Rhinelanders would crush it ere its time beneath the wheels of their lumbering wagons. How long, alas, had the people cried for bread.

GABRIELLE

"THERE'S no denying it: we *do* love each other. Assuredly, as women go, you have not got your equal, and as for men, not one can rival me in the art of loving. My passion for you is just as great as it was when I first began to love you, my longing to see you even more desperate than then. I cherish, adore and honour you most wondrously."

For nine years now they had been lovers. . . . They used to kiss each other before the whole Court, and hold each other's hands, so tender, so confiding.

About them sported César, the little Duke of Vendôme, a delightful cavalier-in-little, now five years old; his brother, Alexandre, the Chevalier de Vendôme, and their little baby sister, Catherine Henriette.

The people were angry with the King for making so much fuss about this Gabrielle of his. The Parisians called her the Duchesse d'Ordure. Not a pleasant name for his dearly beloved. She and her brother and her five sisters were known as "the Seven Deadly Sins."

Henry IV, who put no trust in hearsay, used to go about *incognito* and hear what he could hear.

"The King's right enough," said a Seine boatman. "It's not him that's wrong, it's that dirty strumpet he's got hold of that's bringing us all to ruin. Every day he gives her fine dresses and trinkets, and the poor folk, who find the money for it all, have got to bear the burden. It wouldn't be so bad if his Gabrielle *was* his Gabrielle. But our King is a sad cuckold. . . ."

By way of amusing himself, he had a gallery built to link up the Louvre with the Tuileries, and a little private door cut, so that he could go in and out when he liked without being observed. The man of the mountains was going to seed in this dark, unhealthy

palace, which he could not bring himself to like. And there were far too many highly scented petticoats there. Court life was little to his taste. Etiquette often went by the board.

His physical desires were as strong as ever. He was always dreaming of rustic delights, of wine with a homely tang in it, and junketing with buxom country wenches.

Little love-bouts of that kind never touched his heart. That belonged wholly to his loved one.

Three days it was, no more than three,
That I loved you, and you loved me.

The people blamed him for his building mania, his love-affairs, his lack of kingly dignity, his parsimony and his prodigality.

"Ah," sighed the King with bitterness, "'tis the Frenchman's nature not to love what they have before them. When they see me no more, they will love me; when they have lost me, they will wish me back again."

Since the coronation several attempts had been made on his life, and Jean Chatel had come within an ace of success, in Gabrielle's apartments. He had slit his lip with a blow in the mouth with a knife and knocked out a tooth. Realising that all these would-be regicides were only poor, weak-minded lads driven crazy by the sermons and pamphlets that dragged him through the mud day after day, he expelled the Jesuits and curtailed the freedom of the press.

But he grew more and more depressed. His doctors bled him and physicked him in vain; his jesters, Maître Guillaume and Mathurine—the good Chicot, poor fellow, had been wiped out in the war—might think out countless ingenious diversions; it was all to no purpose. Nothing could woo the King from his melancholy. "Ah!" he kept saying, "I would I were dead!"

He would sooner have been a beggar. So Gabrielle hastened to his side. This tender contact was his only solace. That was the dish that made him oblivious of all his woes. His Gabrielle had

come to be a sweet, delicious habit, his daily bread. He had no secrets from her, but she did not abuse his confidence. Some of these bedtime secrets were dangerous, but no whisper of them ever got abroad. And she proved herself a sage adviser. The reason was, she loved her royal lover, though he did insist on garlic at every meal and seldom took a bath.

Despite Sully and the rest of the nobility, who wanted to see him allied to a foreign princess, he resolved to marry the mother of his children.

And so, for the first time, a lowly daughter of the soil would be seen upon the throne, a kindly woman, speaking with a Normandy accent, a fruitful mother, of gentle and agreeable discourse. She had no foreign kinsfolk for whom she might have to play the traitress, no noble lords for cousins who would expect to have whole provinces assigned to them. The princes of the blood would be true children of France, without any inherited blemish, strong and vigorous.

For three hours by the clock he harangued the grave Sully about his plans. But Sully was obstinate and would not be talked over. Time was when Gabrielle had given the great man a helping hand on the road to success, but now he only wanted to swell the exchequer that Gabrielle had emptied. A foreign princess would fill it, and Sully set to work to negotiate with the Papal Legate for a match between the King, his master, and Marie de' Medici, Princess of Florence, niece of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, with six hundred thousand gold crowns for a dowry.

The King knelt at Gabrielle's feet as she sat in a great armchair. Both of them, with their heads together, were looking at the assortment of royal ladies which Europe was offering France in order that she might choose a bride for her King.

"Oh, but I don't like the look of this one at all; she frightens me," said Gabrielle in a tremulous whisper, looking at Marie de' Medici and her great big eyes.

Henry burst out laughing. Then, without a word, he drew

forth the diamond ring wherewith he had wedded France the day of the coronation, and slipped it on his beloved's finger.

"My heart," said the King, when the kissing was over, "do you know they've been trying to arrange a marriage for me with the Queen of England. She's only sixty-six! True, with a queen possessed of such a crown the question of age does not arise. But in bed? Imagine it! Clearly it's not Sully who's got to marry her. He would not have been so keen."

"Well, and then. . .? And then?" asked Gabrielle in an anxious tone.

"Why, then, the good old dame got me out of the mess herself. 'It's not to be thought of,' said she to my ambassador, 'your King is not my taste and I'm not his. Not that I couldn't still give pleasure to a husband that suited me, but there are other reasons. Whereupon, raising her petticoats, the venerable Elizabeth displayed her thigh, which, it appears, is still in excellent preservation. My Gascon is a good courtier, and had his wits about him. Down he went on one knee and planted a kiss on the aforesaid thigh. The Queen pretended to be angry. Then said the sly dog, 'Forgive me, Madame, for doing what I did, but I am sure the King, my master, would have done as much, if he had seen as much.'"

All was ready for the wedding. The furniture had been ordered, the wedding-dress cut out. The proudest princesses deemed it an honour to wait on Gabrielle, and it was Gabrielle who played the hostess at every official function.

From her prison at Usson, Marguerite, who had been paid a handsome sum down, promised to allow herself to be unmarried. She referred to Gabrielle as her "sister," wrote letters to her, and made a great palaver, and then, as soon as the money was pouched, called her "that contemptible baggage." Howbeit, she would submit to the King—because she knew the King had the means to coerce her. . . .

A special envoy had just gone off to Rome, his mission being to bring back the Pope's blessing on the plan. The wedding was to

take place round about Easter, after Gabrielle—who was expecting her fourth—had got over her confinement.

"Nothing but God, or the King's death, could spoil things for me now," she remarked, with that tremulous, hesitating smile of hers that was always so disarming.

At the end of the winter, the two lovers went to have some stag-hunting at Fontainebleau, then, early in April, she returned to Paris to make her Easter with becoming ceremony, as befitted a queen. The King, in his most affectionate mood, accompanied her as far as Savigny, and gave orders that the utmost care was to be taken of her on the journey. Arm-in-arm, looking like a picture of love's young dream, they were constantly exchanging kisses. At length, with aching hearts, they parted. For a long time the King sat looking over his shoulder in the saddle at the figure of his beloved as she disappeared on the horizon.

On arriving in Paris she dined at Zamet's, the well-known financier, and the King's Italian banker. There she became unwell. The atmosphere of Oriental luxury mingled with a sort of presentiment of Florentine treachery filled her with a vague misgiving. Her aunt, Madame de Sourdis, was away; still, she gave orders that she should be taken to her house, a dark and inconvenient one, not far from the Louvre.

In the morning, the surgeons dragged away from her, bit by bit, a dead child. Suddenly it was perceived that she herself was stricken beyond recall. The beautiful face, all swollen, had taken on a purplish tinge, her body, horribly twisted and convulsed, lost all semblance of a human form. Of all that wondrous beauty nothing now remained but a hideous, shapeless thing. It was all so dreadful, so swift and unforeseen that the two or three persons who beheld it whispered in horrified tones, "'Tis the Devil seizing on his prey." For it was said by some that, in order to bring the King and the country beneath her sway, Gabrielle had entered into a pact with Satan. . . .

But this was not the only view. There were others who murmured under their breath: "This Zamet is the agent of the Grand

Duke of Tuscany, who would stick at nothing so that his niece might sit upon the Throne of France."

The flatterers melted away. Awhile ago, fawned upon by every one, all but Queen, within an ace of the final goal, and now forsaken, on a makeshift bed, sticky with blood, facing her awful death alone, by the dim light of a solitary taper weeping its waxen tears.

La Varenne alone remained at the bedside, watching the distorted body of the dying woman, who, nevertheless, still had strength enough to order that a message should be sent to the King.

Without an instant's delay, Henry leapt upon his swiftest horse, and along roads lashed by the sleet and hailstorms of April, insensible to everything around him, he sped like lightning towards his goal. He took boat across the Seine to shorten the distance, and then remounted his foaming steed. Just before he came to Villejust, he encountered a troop of sad-faced men on horseback who would not let him pass. They were his old and trusty comrades, his true friends, the members of his Council.

"Sire," said the Chancellor de Bellièvre, bowing low, "Sire, she is dead!"

Henry could not believe it. Sobbing, he flung himself into their arms. Hard by was an abbey, and there, utterly fordone, quite broken-hearted, Henry sat him down and covered his face with his hands. And through his fingers, tremulous with fever, streamed his unavailing tears.

Henry would fain start off again, and enfold in one last embrace his beloved Gabrielle. But his companions sternly dissuaded him from this intention. What, would he, the King, go on to Paris, where the people loved him not, and offer them the spectacle of a grey-haired monarch dissolved in tears, following behind the coffin of his mistress? The populace insist that royal favourites should be fair, and tolerate them only in the royal bed.

Heedless of their entreaties, the King rushed to the door and tried to shake them off. At last he grew calmer, suffered himself to be persuaded, and turned back along the way he had come. Be-

neath the volleying rain the little troop rode on their way in silence making for Fontainebleau.

Gabrielle was not dead. . . . His old comrades knew that well enough. But what useful purpose would have been served by a marriage *in extremis*, and, even so, not valid. To assign the crown to the fruit of a double adultery would have meant to kindle the flames of civil war anew, for the nobles would never have bowed the knee to a bastard and, as every one affirmed, Bellegarde's bastard into the bargain.

But Gabrielle was waiting, waiting still. She fought and struggled fiercely to keep her dreadful Adversary at bay. Her ghastly visage strained painfully towards the door through which she looked to see her lover come. She kept calling, calling, "The King! The King! The King!"

"Madame," they said, to soothe her, "he is coming." And again she turned her despairing eyes towards the door. She seemed to hear the clatter of galloping horses in her poor, sick brain. Through the window, the Louvre flung its sombre shadow athwart the room. Someone made mention of the poison which the Grand Duke of Tuscany was alleged to have used to remove this inconvenient favourite from his path. The dying woman was still breathing; she heard and understood it all, but had no strength to speak.

In the dim light, the shadowy weeping form of some faithful attendant lit a taper, which slowly consumed itself away, dripping, dripping on the inlaid floor. A priest in an undertone recited in Latin the prayers for the dying. A little while later the doctors set themselves to straighten out the limbs, all rigid and convulsed, a terrible sight to behold, with the head twisted violently backwards, a corpse to which Death had not brought peace.

How unspeakable a sorrow to us is death that snatches from us one whom yet we fondly love. With the rage of despair burning in his veins, Henry IV plunged deep into the forests, now robing

themselves in the tender green of spring, or shut himself up in his apartments, refusing to see a soul, save his beautiful, darling little César, the apple of his eye, the offspring of his love.

"All flesh is grass, and the glory thereof passeth away, even as the flowers of the field." Thus droned the King's Huguenot companions.

"I have lost my turtle-dove!" sighed the poets, in accents of melancholy languor.

"I am sore in need of comfort," he wrote off to his sister. "For my affliction is as incomparable as she who was the cause of it. Sorrow and Lamentation will go with me even to the grave. Nevertheless, since God hath placed me here, not for my own purposes but for my country's, all my faculties, all my energies shall henceforth be devoted to its advancement and safeguarding. My love is dead at the roots. It will never put forth again."

HENRY THE GOOD

A GREAT rattling of old iron on the paving-stones of the quayside brought the King to the window of his bird-room. A long line of wagons, escorted by men on horseback, fully armed, were lumbering slowly along. Behind them, stolidly seated on a broad-backed, thick-set stallion, clad in sombre Calvinistic broad-cloth, came Sully, bringing up the rear.

After a round of inspection through the length and breadth of the provinces, the Comptroller-General, who had trusted no one but himself to unearth frauds and evasions, was returning home in triumph with no less than five hundred thousand *écus* for his pains.

Just then Sully gave an upward glance; the two cronies exchanged a jovial wink. Their friendship, bred of dangers shared in common in their young days, on many a field of battle, continued, unabated, through the manifold trials and perplexities of peace. Peace, said you? To-day the King was at loggerheads with his people, and, in that struggle, lost the good health and careless mien of which a hundred battles and innumerable vexations had not availed to rob him.

At first he had put on the pace. But then, when he saw what a state of confusion the country was in, he said, "France and I both need a little breathing-space."

War did not account for so many men as did hunger and destitution. The people, the people whom he loved so well, would simply *have* to be fed.

"Never was seen," folk came to say in after years, "a prince more humane, or one that had a greater love for his people."

"My royal predecessors," said Henry, "would have blushed to know the value of a tester. But for my part, I should like to know

what a tester is worth and how much trouble these poor folk are put to to get one, so that they shall not be saddled with a burden greater than they can bear."

He began with the country people, the people he knew most about, the people who had been most down-trodden and oppressed, the most important people of all.

"Tilth and pasture-land, behold the two breasts whence France derives her sustenance, the real *El Dorado*," said Sully, echoing the King's words.

The *taille* was cut down a quarter. The seizure of cattle or agricultural implements belonging to the peasantry was declared illegal. Lastly, all arrears of taxes were remitted.

"It is my will and pleasure that no man shall beg his bread in my kingdom," said Henry the Good.

Foreign speculators and financiers and a whole army of collectors were responsible for a system of fiscal brigandage which it took Sully and his ally the King all the difficulty in the world, and edict after edict, to suppress. What was really wanted to clear away the tangle was not the pen, but the sword. . . .

"God's life, man! Wouldst have me make war on my people? I'd as lief make war on myself! I intend that every farm hand shall always be able to have a fowl for his Sunday dinner!"

The fighting men who had left their estates to strike a blow for France were up to their ears in debt, and the financiers made these worthies pay thirty per cent. interest on the money they lent them; and not a few found on their return that their manors were occupied by vulgar upstarts who had grown fat on the misfortunes of their country.

The provincial governors were proceeding to levy a poll-tax. The King's edict forbidding that anything should be demanded of the people created deep discontent among the greater nobles. D'Épernon, the Governor of Poitou, wanted to fight a duel with Sully.

"*Mon ami*," said the King, "I will be your second."

Henry IV made provision for the support of impoverished

officers and for maimed and disabled soldiers; built hostels for old soldiers, almshouses and leper-hospitals.

Great national works were put in hand in order to provide employment for able-bodied soldiers who had taken to tramping the country like vagrants. An edict for the reclamation of marsh lands was promulgated. The owners of such lands were called upon to have them drained within three months, in default of which, companies would be given powers to carry out the work at their own expense. They would receive half the land thus drained as remuneration for their services.

The plans for the Briare canal to link up the Seine with the Loire were submitted to examination. The course of the Seine called for some rectification in order to facilitate the development of trade with England.

One of the King's chief preoccupations was the provision of means of communication. They were essential for trade, and the King fully realised how all-important for the nation's prosperity trade was destined to become. Even now the Great Fairs at Lyons were attracting customers from places as far away as Turkey.

He had roads constructed, and over the whole system of highways and waterways which spreads like a network over France, he arranged for a regular service of post-horses. That done, he abolished or curtailed the tolls which constituted a serious handicap to trade. And then, like an old wayfarer who knew the ins and outs of the matter, he caused elms to be planted by the roadsides so that a man might travel comfortably in the shade.

Among all these numerous royal edicts, some had reference to the protection of woods and forests and the re-stocking of rivers with fish. With his customary vigilance and severity, Sully saw to it that the new laws were duly carried out.

The King also prohibited duels, in which the combatants often maimed themselves for life for some wholly trivial cause. Finally, he reorganised the Army, fortified the frontier-towns, developed his artillery, and raised funds for peaceful expeditions to Canada.

In his leisure moments he studied the question of establishing a

plantation of mulberry trees for the cultivation of silkworms, in order to facilitate the manufacture in France of those marvellous stuffs which were then only procurable abroad.

All this expenditure raised a storm of protest. Paris was seething with discontent. It became necessary to prohibit the sale of arms there, and to take measures for keeping foreigners under observation. Spain took care to exploit this disaffection.

The magistrates, who were in the habit of selling their verdicts to the highest bidder, protested loudly against the taxes that had been imposed upon them. The Parliament of Bordeaux came bustling up to lay their grievances before the King. The King told them a few home-truths.

"You say my people are oppressed. Well, who oppressed them but you and your corporation? Ah, that rascally corporation! And who wins his case at Bordeaux, eh? Why, the man with the weightiest purse. None of my Parliaments is worth a straw, and you are the worst of them all. Oh, that rascally corporation of yours! I know you; I'm a Gascon, too. Show me a peasant whose vineyard isn't under the thumb of some judge or magistrate. You've only got to be a lawyer, and your nest is feathered right away. Why can't I substitute nails and razors for the fleurs-de-lys which bespangle the seats of my corruptible judges?"

There were plenty of people who pestered the King for money; not one who would pay any away, if he could help it. He had to speak firmly, to put down abuses with a strong hand. The hapless monarch grew more and more unpopular.

When he had given food to the hungry, the next thing he thought about was settling the religious feuds which threatened every moment to break out afresh. Each side had hoped to get the upper hand. The Edict of Nantes, which was intended to hold the scales even, was merely a compromise that satisfied no one.

"If the King could live for ever," said the Huguenots disconsolately, "we should be easy in our minds. But if he dies, what is to become of us?"

Parliament refused to register the Edict. No one was in the mood to bury the hatchet.

"It will all come right in time. Paris wasn't built in a day," said the King philosophically.

When he could stand it no longer he bolted away to the woods and coverts and went hunting the stag or the roebuck. The wild onrush of the hounds, the melancholy music of the horn, the scent of the corpses, the excitement of the chase banished his cares and gave him momentary relief from the strange sadness that came upon him when he felt that he was not loved. Ah, how tremendous was his need of love! In his letters to his officers the same burden is constantly recurring. "Never cease to love me!" "I am dying to see you." "You ought to be more anxious to see me, knowing how I love you."

To his enemy, the Duke of Savoy, who was holding two of his dearest friends as prisoners, he wrote:

"Monsieur, if you love me, I beg you to see to it that they are set at liberty, for I long for their freedom as much as if they were my own brothers."

While the Comptroller of Finance was shut up in his room struggling with his recalcitrant figures, the King spent his nights there, growing old, and more and more intractable. When anyone came to see him and he condescended to receive the importunate visitor, he would get up, turn himself round, first one way and then the other, and say, with an ill grace:

"Well, there you are; you've seen me. Now be off!"

HENRIETTE D'ENTRAGUES

THE Court was getting tired of wearing mourning for Gabrielle. Sully and the Council were continually trying to persuade the King that he ought to marry again, for his own peace of mind and the good of the kingdom. At last, from very weariness, he gave in and agreed that the matter should be broached to Marie de' Medici, the Florentine princess.

La Varenne, his director of diversions, together with some other brilliant, pleasure-loving young gentlemen, did their best to woo him from his melancholy by endeavouring to entangle him in other love-affairs.

But no, nothing could ever replace the voluptuous charms of the beauty that was now no more. True, the King, from mere force of habit, beguiled the passing hour with this or that obliging lady they happened to beat up for him; but, the *passade* over, he never gave it another thought. The courtiers were at their wits' end.

There were signs of trouble brewing in the south, and Henry decided he would go down and see what the matter was himself. Arrayed in solemn black, silent and sorrowful, the cortège set out on its journey. Hardly were they clear of Paris when the King was overwhelmed with delight at the wonders of the spring, gardens and fields a-bloom with flowers, birds caroling wildly on every tree. For nearly two months now his tears and prostration had cut him off from the world. So, then, everything was going on as before, it seemed; and spring still followed in the wake of winter.

The reawakening of the earth had always moved him strangely. He felt that spring was putting new blood in his veins. Deep in thought, he went on his way. Every step his horse took shook forth new fragrance from the flowery earth. The wind was warm and laden with sudden perfumes. Away, dull care! Care that

checks the happy course of life. His companions, following discreetly in his wake, saw him pull off a bud and chew it, saw him pluck a flowery branch and thrust it in his loosened doublet. From the blue heavens above, the song of the larks came down in stanchless cascades of sound. Eagerly, with dilated nostrils, the King sniffed in the balmy air of spring, and, listening to the pæan of universal joy, he suddenly began to sing himself at the top of his voice.

Then the courtiers knew that the good times were coming back again at last.

Gaily the party rode through la Beauce. At evening, the outlines of a château rose up before their eyes, and there they decided to call a halt for the night. It was Malesherbes, the lordship of the Balzacs of Entragues. The Lord of the château and his daughters, Henriette and Marie, hastened to extend a welcome to the King. The young women were not strikingly beautiful, but they were daughters of that Marie Touchet, the mistress of Charles IX, whose anagram significantly read: "*Je charme tout*"—I charm all. The one-time royal favourite, grown stout and severe of mien with the passage of the years, kept a stealthy eye on the grey-haired King, who seemed to have taken a fancy to her elder daughter Henriette, the livelier and wittier of the two. Amusing and captivating, nothing daunted her eighteen summers. Her daring and provocative disposition offered as striking a contrast to the careless grace of Gabrielle as did her dark and lissom figure to the dead woman's florid and rather animal attractiveness.

The King was charmed. The fire was kindled. He stayed on several days at the château, quite oblivious of the object of his journey. The fair one's brother, the son of Charles IX, furious at the attentions paid by the King to his sister, told him roundly that he would not brook such conduct. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to leave, and Henry took a reluctant farewell of this delectable abode. He returned post-haste to Paris in a state of high excitement. Lovely ladies were paraded before his eyes: he never so much as glanced at them. Hardly had he arrived when he dis-

patched a messenger with words of love for Henriette. The messenger was ill-received—by the girl's father!

A family of schemers and cynical place-hunters, the Entragues were past-masters in the art of match-making. They took away their daughter and put her in another château. Stung by this opposition, exasperated by the violence of his desires, the King set out to discover her whereabouts. This was no very difficult matter. The family had seen to that.

From this complicated and elaborate gambit, the Court conjectured—and the conjecture was well founded—that a *grande passion* was in the offing.

The King was in a terrible state at the thought of losing this ardent and high-stepping young person who had shown herself by no means deaf to his entreaties. He begged and prayed, showered money on the parents and promised to put down a hundred thousand crowns the night she suffered him, after all this waiting, to taste the blandishments of her caresses.

Week after week went by, but the delays only riveted the King's chains more firmly. So mighty is the spell with which blind love bewitches a man, that he never saw that he was being fooled. Relying on her charms and her coquetry, she lured him on and on. To eke out a little, when that little is of prime quality, is the way to create an appetite for more. The King's hungry hands still tingled with the teasing memory of a pair of pretty little breasts which he had called "*mes petits garçons*." Her parents said she was a virgin, and, certes, that was a thing worth paying for. He was now forty-six and looked still older. Though to a commoner a duchess is never more than thirty, even a crown cannot hide a man's age from a woman who loves him not.

Sully was obstinate and dour. He held out against the thing; haggled and argued before he would untie the national purse-strings. "A hundred thousand crowns for what will probably turn out a pig in a poke!" he cried with bitter irony.

In these fashionable circles the dream, the great ambition of every female heart, was the Throne; and whenever the King set his

heart upon a woman, she always began to put a premium on herself, posing, forthwith, as a paragon of all the virtues. The prize offered by Henry IV was the estate and marquissate of Verneuil. The other side wanted more. Henriette postponed her fall; the King was burning with impatience. Fast in the toils, haunted and tortured by the thoughts of her, there was only one girl in the world for him; and that was that little imp of Satan, Henriette.

She put on a weeping air; pretended she was but putty in her parents' hands, and that the parents' price was a promise of marriage; no more, no less. And when he saw her, her parents were always on the spot.

"I beg and pray of you, my sweet, that you will henceforth leave your father out of the business. Seeing that we can fix the matter up between us, let us do so to our mutual content. The money to buy you an estate is ready. You shall want for nothing. Let us, I beg of you, on my knees, take our happiness into our own hands."

He knew not what to make of her. Was she a consenting party to this sordid haggling? Was she a victim—and a most delicious one? Or was she the wildest little scamp on God's earth?

Quite unstrung, he could not sleep at night for thinking of her. He called her his "own heart," but he began to despise her. All the same he intended to have her, and he did not care at what price.

"My heart," he wrote, "I love you so much that I cannot live without you. I shall be seeing you this week, but I would much rather it was alone than otherwise. Devise some means so that I can give you, in reality, the million kisses I'm always giving you in my dreams."

Thus Henry. And Henriette, cajoling, weeping, and adorable amidst her tears, moaned plaintively and said:

"I have begged and prayed my folk to be satisfied with a verbal promise of marriage; but they insist on having it in writing. It is only a matter of form, for I know there's no power in the land that could run counter to a King so doughty and so good a swordsman, a King who could always muster thirty thousand men and thirty cannon to make good his words. If you love me, as I love you, you won't raise any difficulties about doing as they wish."

Henry IV could not abide courtiers. With a quip, a jest, a wink of his mocking eye, he would prick the bubble of their flattery and show them he was no dupe. But if a woman declared her love for him, he swallowed everything she said without a murmur. Nevertheless, he did try to occupy his mind with other things. In his efforts to shake off the thoughts of Henriette he would go and gamble like a madman at Zamet's. Zamet also found women for him. One of them, "a comely wanton" known as Claude, kept him amused some little time. He was present at all the banquets and ballets that took place in Paris. He enjoyed the favours of the wife of the president of the Boinville parliament, as well as those of a counsellor's lady on the same body. Then he went off for some sport on the Loire, and had an affair with a maid-of-honour belonging to Queen Louise, Henry III's widow.

At the same time he did not neglect the duties of his office.

"France is under a great obligation to me," he said, "for I work hard for her."

He planted mulberry trees, gave his royal protection to several industries, including silk, glass, tapestry, and fine linen. In his galleries at the Louvre he established the best sculptors, clockmakers, cutlers, perfumers, workers in precious stones, sword-makers, gilders, damasceners, inventors of mathematical instruments, weavers of Oriental and other high-class rugs and carpets. And still France was not grateful.

The Edict of Nantes, which had been registered at last under threats from the King, who was sick to death of the delays and disputes that had been going on for years, was not being carried out without opposition on the part of the Catholics. Finally, the Protestants got their towns of refuge, their courts of justice and their places of worship. But among the Catholic party the unpopularity of the peacemaker continued to increase.

He felt that the sword was always hanging over his head. Already seven would-be regicides had been broken on the wheel, burnt or hanged, in the Place de Grève. His kitchens were not at all safe: and their doors were constantly guarded by sentries. An

attempt was made to put some kind of subtle Italian poison in his bed; the kind which does its work and leaves no trace.

Preachers, denouncing the King's sinful practices from the pulpit, stirred up the indignation of the masses, who always take sides with those who shout the loudest. Astrologers and almanac-makers were already giving out that the King would be struck down, in the street, by the knife of one of his own supporters.

Despite his cheery scepticism, Henry IV sometimes let himself be influenced by the superstitions of the times.

"You see!" he said to Sully, his everlasting stand-by, "you see; they'll kill me."

Howbeit, hard work, anxiety, women, cards, tilting, hunting, wine, nothing chased away the memory of Henriette. She had already cost him a fortune. Why worry about a little more or less? His passion brooked no delay. In after years, his grandson, Louis XIV, who was not greatly given to the pleasures of the flesh and would never have lost his head for a woman, came to deliver himself of the following:

"If we surrender our heart, we must retain absolute control of our mind. The affections of the lover, and the decisions of the sovereign, must be kept strictly apart; the fair one who ministers to our pleasures must never be at liberty to discuss affairs of State, or the persons who serve us therein. The two things should be kept quite separate."

Henry IV, notwithstanding that the negotiations for the Florentine match were very far advanced, drew up the document, dangerous though it was to the peace of the kingdom, which the d'Entragues demanded, before handing over their daughter.

He had always consulted his companions, d'Aubigné, in his day, and afterwards Sully, about his public and private concerns. The present business was no exception. One morning, at Fontainebleau, he took the Lord High Comptroller and Grand Master of Artillery apart into the gallery, and there placed the imprudent document in his hands.

THE SECOND FAVOURITE

WITH his cold, blue eye Sully gazed at the King as he paced anxiously up and down the gallery.

"This . . .!" growled the Minister, in a tone of disgust.

"What think you of it, *mon ami*?" asked Henry, striding up to him.

"I must ask for time to reflect, Sire, before I give an opinion."

"Oh, come now, out with it, man; speak your mind, and don't be so annoyingly cautious. This silence vexes me more than your most exasperating words could do. In a matter of this kind, it's pretty certain, I know, that you won't see eye to eye with me, if only on account of the hundred thousand crowns I made you dole out with such extreme reluctance. I promise you I won't lose my temper, whatever you say. So come, speak freely, and tell me what you think about it. I want you to; and what's more, I command you to, so out with it!"

"You wish me to speak, Sire, and you promise you will not get in a temper with me, whatever I may say and do?"

"Yes! Yes! I'll promise what you like."

Sully picked up the paper, and tore it into fragments under the King's very nose.

"There you are then, Sire; since it pleases Your Majesty to know what I think of such a promise."

"Here! The devil! You're mad!"

"It is true, Sire. I am a madman and a fool, and I would I were such an egregious fool as not to have my like in France."

The King, in a fury, resumed his march up and down the gallery, and Sully went on talking, as if to himself, saying that never, never would Queen Marguerite agree to a divorce if it was merely to enable the King to marry anyone so blown upon as Henriette d'Entragues, daughter of his brother's mistress. Besides, he added,

the Pope would never consent to a divorce. It would heap ridicule on the kingly office, which had already fallen into sufficient disrepute.

But Henry was a great deal too far gone in love for the little rake. Leaving Sully to grumble his bellyful, he went and wrote out another promise precisely similar to the first, and had it witnessed by two secretaries of State.

"We, Henry IV, by the grace of God King of France and Navarre, promise and make oath before God, on our royal word and honour, to Messire François de Balzac, lord of Entragues, Knight of our Orders, that, in consideration of his giving us for consort the demoiselle Henriette Catherine de Balzac, his daughter, if within six months, dating from the first of the present month, she becomes pregnant and is delivered of a son, then, forthwith, we will take her to wife as our lawful spouse, whom we will wed publicly in the sight of Holy Church according to the rites and ceremonies usual and appropriate on such occasions. In order to give greater weight to the present undertaking, we promise and make oath, as before, to ratify and repeat it under our seal as soon as we have obtained from our Holy Father the Pope the dissolution of the marriage between us and Dame Marguerite of France, with permission to marry again according to our wishes.

"In witness whereof we have written and signed these presents.

"This first day of October 1599.

"HENRY."

Henriette did not capitulate immediately. . . . To beguile his consuming ardour, the King took to writing verse:

Le cœur blessé, les yeux en larmes,
Ce cœur ne songe qu'à vos charmes;
Vous êtes mon unique amour.
Jour et nuit pour vous je soupire;
Si vous m'aimez à votre tour,
J'aurai tout ce que je désire,

Je vous offre sceptre et couronne;
Mon sincère amour vous les donne.
A qui puis-je mieux les donner?
Roi trop heureux, sous votre empire
Je croirai doublement régner,
Si j'obtiens ce que je désire.

At last, on the 15th October, the fortress surrendered. On the 14th the King, unable to contain himself, wrote off to his inamorata as follows:

"My dearest love, your father has consented to all my wishes. To-morrow night, 'my little fellows' will be well caressed by me. The joy I feel cannot be put in words. I will express it to you to-morrow."

And the day after, as he had been obliged to return from the joyous Château of Malesherbes to Paris, he took his pen and, tremulous with emotion, wrote:

"My dearest love, I grieve not for your pain. If I caused it, I will cure it."

The wily La Varenne laughed in his beard to see how easily the King was taken in.

The Marquise de Verneuil, installed in the Hôtel de Larchant in Paris, was at once the King's torment and delight. She was amusing, charming and malicious. Her barbed wit was deeply wounding. A hundred times Henry had it in mind to break the whole thing off; but an irresistible bond kept him a thrall to his wayward siren. The night redeemed the chagrin of the day, and wit won pardon for the mordant spite. Sometimes, in his anger, Henry IV remembered he was King.

"You must put aside these rude, ungracious ways if you would be all in all to me," said he, "for as a King and a Gascon, I cannot

brook them. Those who love truly, as I do, look to be made much of, not to be treated with rudeness. I am not very well pleased with you; I cannot conceal it, my darling."

He rebelled against this sensual domination, tried to fight against it, but the full red mouth and the daring grace of the adorable wasp, the stimulus of her sparkling impertinence brought him back a captive to her charms.

Between the visitations of his passion, his Gascon nature sometimes reasserted its ascendancy. One day, as he was presenting a magnificent necklace to his mistress, she affected to disdain it, so he took it back and sent her a hundred apricots instead.

Meanwhile, the Pope having annulled the marriage of Henry and Marguerite de Valois, the negotiations with the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the uncle of Marie de' Medici, were pursued with increased activity. Money was wanted, and a great deal of it, for a war which seemed inevitable with Savoy, which had forcibly seized Saluces, one of the Calvinist towns of refuge.

Sully, without encroaching on the treasure which, with all a peasant's tenacity, he was amassing in the Bastille vaults, was strengthening the artillery. He demanded that the dowry of the future Queen of France should be increased to one million five hundred thousand *écus d'or*. The Grand Duke refused, keeping to the six hundred thousand *écus* promised, of which Henry IV owed five hundred thousand. . . .

Sully squeezed the rich, compelled the contractors to disgorge their profits, increased indirect taxation, and suppressed the emoluments allotted to the nobles who paraded at the head of the army.

Henriette d'Entragues, seeing the time going by without any prospect of her becoming a mother, openly displayed her chagrin. She looked Henry up and down with scorn, and, in cutting words, told him what she thought of him. In Gabrielle's day they had had to operate on the King in order to cut away a painful growth, and it was then currently reported that he would never become a father again. Nevertheless, some time after the operation, Gabrielle gave birth to a daughter. Very cruelly Henriette called her love "Cap-

tain-Do-Your-Best," and told him that the King's second had been killed.

There was no mystery about their nights. The lampooners were in clover. The intrigue was an inexhaustible mine for their ribaldry. At last, the Marquise found herself with child. The condition under which the promise became valid was thus fulfilled—just in time!

If Henry wrote this unfortunate promise of his in the belief that the lady's family would follow the example of the proud Corisande, he was in a fool's paradise. Corisande had shed some bitter tears over the document which the faithless King had written in his own blood, but she had made no effort to keep him to his word. Not so the d'Entragues. Henriette and her father loudly proclaimed their rights, and did their best to put the fat in the fire by sending a copy of the King's promise to the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

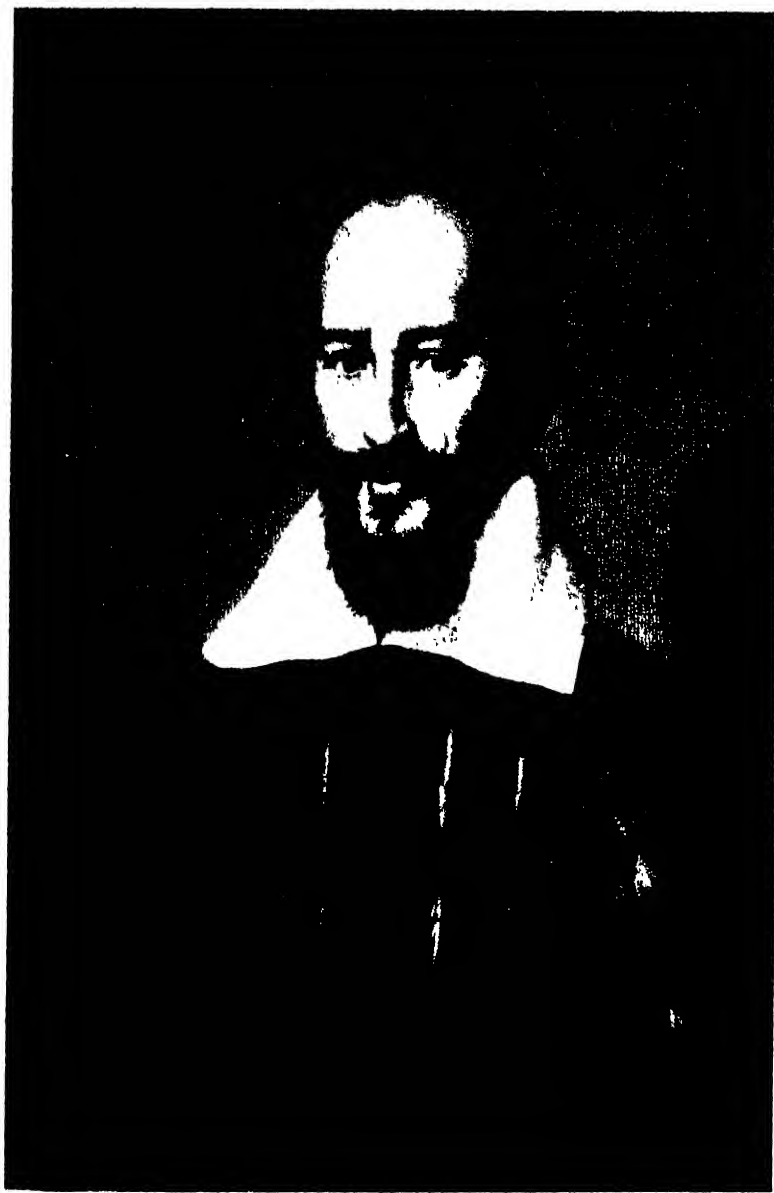
This determination to have their pound of flesh distinctly cooled the lover's ardour. It was borne in upon him that she did not love him for himself alone, and that was a thorn in his flesh.

Sully took a gloomy view of things. The treasury was empty and France a laughing-stock.

"By my halidome, Sire; what a mad-cap you are!" exclaimed the lord of the money-bags.

Henry put his arm round his old friend's neck and laughed. But there was a sad look in his eyes. The two cronies shared one thing between them and that was the steady outlook of men who had suffered hardship and entered into the lives of the common people. Two things and two things only turned their heads. With the King, it was a woman, any woman on whom he set his heart; in the case of Sully, who kept up a little court of his own, it was the ambition of allying his family with the noblest in the land.

But it only needed a dance tune of old Gascony to move them both—the King to tears, the grim-faced Sully to trip it on the light fantastic toe.



SULLY

British Museum

Henry IV was not lucky in his love-affairs. He told the Comte d'Entragues that domestic considerations and not reasons of State forbade him to fulfil his promise. D'Entragues accused the King of seeking to dishonour his daughter. He had got all he wanted of her and now he was for flinging her aside.

The King, who was often ailing, was greatly upset by these worries and troubles. He grew feverish. The many nights he had spent roughing it in the open air, his long, wild rides, the fights he had fought, the treachery of his kinsfolk, long spells of weariness and anxiety had begun to tell on him. He had always been prone to attacks of pleurisy and fever, and he now fell seriously ill.

Only his spirit kept him up. He would walk his Councillors to a standstill, he was for ever ring-tilting and playing tennis, till his clothes were wringing wet. Some sort of urinary trouble now laid him low. They put him to bed, bled him, sounded him, physicked him. All manner of herbs were gathered and cooked to compose a douche. It was all useless.

He was very depressed, and sought consolation in his indispensable Plutarch. His confessor, an ex-curé of the Halles, who could jest broadly enough when he had a mind, and was not too squeamish about shriving and absolving his royal penitent, told him that he must really make up his mind to mend his ways.

The wise men on his Council, whose love-making days were long since over, subjected him to the sternest admonitions. One day in April 1600, being utterly sick at heart, he wrote these words to Henriette:

"However callous and shallow-hearted you may be, the love, the honour, the benefits you have received at my hands might have had some restraining effect upon you if it had not been for your evil nature. I will not chide you further now, though, as you know, I ought to do so. I ask you to return the promise which you hold, and not to put me to the disagreeable necessity of taking other steps to recover it. I should like to have an answer by to-night."

The King received a touching letter from the outraged mistress, but not the promise. That was in safe custody.

"I felt some time ago that my happiness was too great, and that some corresponding disaster would soon befall me. You are pleased to make my tears the price of the public rejoicings with which France will acclaim your marriage.

"I grieve, not because you are fulfilling the wishes of your subjects—that you are bound to do—but because your marriage will spell the end of my life; because, henceforth, I shall be an exile alike from your presence and your heart.

"Henceforward I want to live in solitude, out of reach of the disdainful glances of those who knew me when I dwelt in your good graces. If Kings are accustomed to bear in memory those whom they once loved, remember, I beg of you, a young woman who once was yours and to whom you plighted your troth in order that you might rob her of her good name.

"Your unhappy and very obedient servant and subject,
"HENRIETTE."

This letter was but a ruse, but it seems to have struck home. As soon as he was well again, he felt very dissatisfied with himself, and all his old affection for the astute Marquise returned once more. But, a sadder and a wiser man, he refrained from flying off to Malesherbes, whither she had withdrawn into privacy.

He worked his hounds to death, hunting the stag and the roe from morning till night in the deepest recesses of the forest of Fontainebleau. He dispatched wild boars on foot, and at night, without staying to put off his hunting attire, he flung himself down at the card-table and played as if the devil was behind him. He seldom lost, because he cheated. . . . There was a certain amount of the rapscallion in his composition, and he confessed himself that if he had not been a King he would have swung on the gallows.

He got annoyed if he did not win. Next day Sully would pay up his losses with a wry face. At night, it began all over again.

On the 24th May, the King had to send his official declaration to Marie de' Medici, whom he only knew from her likeness:

"The virtues and perfections which illumine your nature and earn you the admiration of the world at large, long since kindled in me a desire to render you that honour and service your qualities deserve. Being unable to assure you in person of my inviolable affection, I have decided, pending receipt of that consent which, if heaven grant my prayers, will not be long delayed, to select a trusty servant to perform that office in my name.

"He will reveal my heart to you. You will find it full of a passionate desire to cherish and to love you all my life as the mistress of my affections.

"I beg that you will permit him, when he has paid his devoirs and kissed your hands on my behalf, to offer you the duty of a prince destined by heaven for you alone, even as heaven destined that you, with all your virtues, should belong to me."

That done, all his energies were devoted to preparing for war. He gave an eye to everything, just as he had done in the old days when he led his tattered regiments to victory. And the joy of finding himself at the head of an army once more, the acrid smell of powder, the free and easy sort of life he led in camp, banished every other preoccupation from his mind. He felt far happier in the saddle than on the throne. He was much better at talking to his men than to his subjects.

Nevertheless, they were not the soldiers of the old days, brave as lions, convinced that right was on their side, and shedding their blood with passionate ardour. The soldiers he now had under him were of a totally different order. They were all mercenaries, save a handful who had led the fight on other fields, and a man does not willingly lay down his life for lucre.

Just as he was on the point of setting out for Lyons, where his artillery was concentrating in force, a terrible storm broke over the Ile de France. The lightning burst into the Marquise de Verneuil's bedroom, and, running along under the bed, gave her such a shock that that same night she was delivered of a still-born child.

Until then, Henriette had not abandoned all hope of seeing her ambitions come to pass, but that dead child meant the irretrievable

downfall of all her aspirations. Bitterly she wept while her family stood around the bed, with dismay written on their faces.

Seeing her sunk thus low, the King came to visit her and mingled his tears with hers, though at heart he was not displeased at the turn (fortunate indeed for him) that things were taking.

With some of the load off his mind, he resumed his journey. On his way he found himself at the château of Queen Louise. He went to pay her his respects. That was the ostensible reason, but really he wanted to see one of her maids-of-honour with whom he was on terms. On the 15th July, when Henriette rose sadly from her bed of suffering, the marriage by proxy of the King of France and the Princess de' Medici was to have been celebrated in Florence, in circumstances of great pomp.

But owing to various unforeseen contretemps the ceremony was postponed. On the 24th July, however, we find the King writing a very intimate and confidential letter to the lady, whom he clearly regarded as his wife already, although he had never even seen her.

"I have been taking the waters at Pougucs," he said, "and am feeling all the better. I completed my cure yesterday. As you set store by my good health, so do I by yours. I command you to take care of it so that when you arrive we may be able to make a bonny baby that will move our friends to laughter and our enemies to tears."

On the 11th August the King declared war on Savoy. On the 20th, with his customary rapidity, he bore swiftly down on Chambéry, which immediately surrendered.

The conquering hero displayed the colours of Marie de' Medici, but the very first flags he captured from the enemy he sent to Henriette.

THE COMING OF MARIE

WHILE the soldiers were putting up the tents on a field white with early snow, the King, with the sweat of the battle he had won still pouring off him, dragged off his iron gauntlet, flung it on the ground, and, seating himself on his helmet, began writing a letter on a drum.

Two messengers muffled up in wolfskin were standing by. One was to take the first letter to Marie de' Medici, whom the King referred to familiarly as his "mistress."

"Let's put war on one side. Make haste and come as soon as may be. If it were seemly to say one was in love with one's wife, I should tell you I was greatly in love with you. But I would rather bear witness to the fact in a place where there will be no witnesses but you and me."

"Good-bye, my mistress. I end with a hundred thousand kisses on your beautiful hands."

The eager cavalier sealed this tender missive. Then, without changing his pen, he wrote with no less ardour to Henriette, who was quartered but a few leagues away.

"My pet, I had to be off so early reconnoitring the roads that, until this moment, I have been deprived of the pleasure of reading your news. I have kissed your letter over and over again, since you weren't here to be kissed in person. I am off to-morrow and hope that on Friday I shall be near enough to call on you to keep the promise you gave me on leaving, if I happened to turn up one night without any luggage.

"Good-night, my heart, my very own. I kiss and re-kiss you a million times over."

The fact was that Henriette d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil,

had gathered fresh hope when she saw that the Tuscan ceremony was not taking place, and had come post-haste to follow in the King's victorious footsteps. Their first interview had been so violent that Henry, in a passion, ordered them to saddle his horse, for he was off again to camp. But so tired were his merry men, and their horses so dead-beat, that the fair Fury had the whole night in which to make amends.

Next day, Henry, in a calmer frame of mind, went back to Grenoble, and with him went the Marquise, chafing in silence.

From that day she had not left him.

She looked very stylish on horseback, so dark and tall and slim. The royal Captain presented his army to her and made her prance beside him beneath triumphal arches. Glory he never really enjoyed to the full, unless it were shared with a woman.

Henriette employed all her feminine wiles, played her highest trumps. She had won back the man; she made no doubt she would win back the monarch. She did not mince matters. The absent fiancée came in for the rough side of her tongue. She used to refer to her as "Your Lady Banker," and lay at her door all the sins and vices of the Medicis. The King was a soldier again and he was happy. To all these barbs of Henriette's attacks he retorted with some very broad rejoinders, and it ended in their both bursting out into roars of laughter.

But when, on the 8th October, the news of the marriage celebration arrived, the favourite's fury knew no bounds. She broke out into terrific imprecations.

"His Majesty had to put up with the most cruel indignities and insults, heaped upon him almost publicly, the sort of thing that a woman beside herself with rage might have launched at a man of inferior station."

Having exhausted her stock of insults, she spat this piece of venom at him:

"'Tis a good thing for you that you're a King. If you weren't, not a soul would put up with you, for you stink like carrion."

She brandished the famous promise in his face; she shouted that *she* came first.

He spoke of reasons of State, told her that he did not really care a straw for this Florentine union, and, more in love with her than ever, began to find a charm in her outbreaks of wrath, her insults, her tearing and scratching, and in the passionate reconciliations which followed.

On the 19th October he acknowledged his promise and signed some documents that might well have invalidated his marriage. In Henriette's presence he gave orders to a Capuchin to convey the said documents to the Pope. Henriette now thought all was well, and agreed to depart for Paris, yet still lingered on.

Meanwhile the Capuchin, a converted Protestant, who addressed the King familiarly and knew better than he did himself what was in the back of his mind, decided to take the longest road to Rome.

Victory attended Henry IV. Thanks to his valour and to Sully's artillery, the war was won before the enemy had time to realise where they were. The war was won despite the treachery of Biron—how sad a blow was that!—who had stood beside him so valiantly in the civil wars.

The whole country surrendered to the great French King, whose renown was even greater beyond his frontiers than within them.

The royal army refrained from burning and looting. Few women were maltreated; no one was put to the torture. When people expressed their amazement at his humanity, for wars were not generally waged like that in those days, he said, "I am at war with the Duke, not with his people."

Meanwhile, Marie de' Medici was embarking at Leghorn in order to proceed to France, *via* Marseilles.

But what was to be done with the Marquise? Suppose she broke out into one of her violent tempers? The King loved her more than ever. He could not do without her. She gave him the poison that he loved. She had now taken to wearing crimson robes, as though she were the Queen. Her pride knew no bounds. How

were they going to get her out of the way before the bride arrived?

The King was tenderness itself. He promised, if he had to go through with the Florentine affair, that he would marry Henriette to a prince of the blood so as to bring her closer to him and to the Throne. He made over to her the dues on sundry articles of merchandise, for he felt sure that Sully would never part with any of his funds for a discarded mistress. He was bedewed with her tears and shed plenty of his own. He vowed eternal fidelity, and swore that no wretched reasons of State should ever break it. He would not consummate the marriage. . . .

Henry was undoubtedly sincere. He always was. People who live with an intensity like his, always live in the particular moment. They do not lie. It is not they, but truth that changes.

The imperious Marquise was persuaded to retire. They both set out together from Chambéry, where they had been staying. On Lake le Bourget the King put Henriette on a covered barge adorned with carvings richly gilt. It was called the *Bucentaure*. She would journey along the Savières Canal to the Rhône, and so to Lyons, and thence to Paris. In order to be on the safe side, La Varenne accompanied the wayward Marquise. Who could say whether she wouldn't play some scurvy trick on her lover and linger somewhere on the line of route to assist in welcoming the Queen?

Henry stood on the bank and saw his beloved disappear gradually into the distance.

It was high time. Marie de' Medici, who had landed at Marseilles on the Third of November, was getting nearer and nearer to Lyons, where the King had arranged to meet her.

The *Bucentaure* disappeared in the mists of the lake, weighed down to the water's edge with gifts from the conquered towns which the favourite had caused to be presented to her. The leather trunks containing the personal belongings of the Marquise were swallowed up among all these accumulations of treasures. Nevertheless they had their value too. . . .

These feminine fal-lals, these suggestive shifts in finest Venetian cambric with their dainty lace trimmings, silk stockings and satin garters, robes of taffeta and brocade, sweet little ermine muffs, boxes filled with aphrodisiacs: toad and mandragora powder wherewith Henriette reinforced her natural gifts—all this created uneasiness in the public mind.

Scarcely had Henry seen the last of his beloved plague, scarcely had the wind with the smell of snow in it dried the tears upon his face, than his thoughts turned to the grand-ducal galley which, all encrusted with gems, was voyaging o'er the Latin sea, bringing him a fair princess whom he had never yet beheld.

Six other barques, all hung with banners, freighted with a brilliant throng, escorted, to the sound of languorous music, that dreamland ship. There was a spice of romance in all that, something that flattered the imagination of the middle-aged hero, who couldn't make up his mind to settle down to the humdrum life of royal respectability.

THE SECOND MARRIAGE

MARIE DE' MEDICI had arrived at Lyons. Very strung up, bubbling over with excitement like any boy, the King, who was forced to stay on in Savoy to stamp out the smouldering embers of the war, could think and dream of nothing but his young princess.

Henriette, to whom he sent a daily messenger, was chewing the cud of her discontent along the interminable highways of la Beauce.

And then the snow came, and came in such quantities that the army, completely immobilised, was forced to abandon the idea of launching another offensive against the enemy who, though vanquished, refused to carry out the treaties.

The King, forsaking his house, his Court, his attendants and his troops, embarked on the Rhône. But navigating that impetuous flood, with shoals and whirlpools perpetually confronting those who venture upon it, required more patience than he could boast of.

He had completed no more than half the journey, when he got on horseback again, and riding at full speed along the ice-bound roads, came at last to Lyons. It was dark when he arrived and the gates of the city were closed. Scething with impatience, he made himself known and tore along at the gallop. He found that the Queen was dining, alone. Anxious to see without being seen, the King concealed himself in a gallery that linked up the dining-room with the bedroom. When, rising from the table, Marie made her way back to her bedroom, the King took a good look at her. He was disappointed. She was ten years older than her portrait showed her. Twenty-seven was her age, but she looked a full thirty. It was impossible, as she was wearing hoops and an elaborate ruff, to say what her figure was like, but it was clear she was stout.

The King stood a moment quite taken aback. But since Henriette's departure, he had been living the life of a celibate. And then that dark and grasshopper-like attraction of Henriette had awakened in him a craving for something florid and abundant. He liked his geese fat—he always told them to fatten some specially for him, in Béarn—and he liked his women plump.

As soon as the Queen's door was shut to, he went up and knocked. He was in a hurry. It was a good two months now since Marie had been married by proxy; she must have got used, by this time, to the idea that she belonged to him. He had written her plenty of love letters. No beating about the bush for him. None of that mopping and mowing, none of those sighings and languishings that the Spaniards were so fond of affecting. Besides, the sooner a Dauphin was born, the better for every one concerned. . . .

A dwarf wearing a veil, and as dark as a nigger, opened the door, and, seeing who it was, murmured, with a very ill grace, "*Viva il Re!*" The Princess advanced to greet her spouse, and made a deep curtsy before him.

The plumes of the royal hat swept the ground. Marie stammered out a few words in Italian. This white-bearded husband completely took her breath away.

The only Italian Henry knew he had learnt from Catherine, and that language, reminding him as it did of the terrible Queen-Mother, always gave him an uncomfortable feeling down the spine.

Marie knew no French; so by way of introduction and welcome, the King planted a very full-blooded kiss on her lips. Then he told them to tell her that he had come unattended and without any baggage, and that he would like to share her bed.

This cavalier procedure took Marie's breath away. Besides they were not, strictly speaking, married. The nuptial blessing was not to be bestowed till some few days later. She made as if to shrink back, and said they would have to wait for the benediction. Henry replied that there was no need of any more ceremonies. Those that had taken place at Florence were enough.

His determined manner quite upset the princess, who was seized with such a fright that she went cold all over and had to be put into bed between warmed sheets.

Meanwhile the King was waiting at the door. Having had a good talking-to from her ladies-in-waiting, she sent word to him that she had come with the sole desire to please him and to do his will. This put him right, and in he came again. His strenuous ride and his eagerness had heated him, and he could be smelt all over the room.

While they were dragging off his boots, he caught sight of the little veiled dwarf, Leonora Galigai, Marie's inseparable companion. She was terribly afraid of the Evil Eye, and, in order to ward it off, she stuck up a little coral horn on his back, whispering, "Corna! Corna!"

He had the little black midget put out of the room, and took his wife *à la guisarde*.

There, on the feather bed before him, was this mass of pasty, flabby flesh, the usual heritage of princesses brought up in dim palatial chambers with insufficient daylight. How the firm, fiery, resilient beauty of Henriette gained by comparison.

Notwithstanding all the perfumes with which her women had bedewed her—for at Lyons, as at Paris, water was a precious commodity, moreover it was too cold for washing all over—the bride was greatly incommoded by the smell of her swarthy spouse. She had no compunction in telling the doll-like fops who formed her entourage all about it next day; whereas the King, on his side, appeared thoroughly contented, and publicly extolled the charming graces of the young queen. He even blew his own trumpet, saying that his wife and he were agreeably surprised with each other, he at finding her more fair and gracious than he had imagined, and she at discovering how much younger he was than she could possibly have believed, seeing the whiteness of his beard.

To avoid expense, Henry presented Gabrielle's diamonds to Marie.

The crowd of voluble Italians who danced attendance on the Queen made Henry scowl. Signor Concini struck him as a parti-

cularly unpleasant person. He couldn't make out a word of their cackle, and was terribly bored. The stuffy air of the rooms, heavy with perfumes and heated by numerous silver braziers, nearly choked him. He had to get out of it. A good long ride on horseback always put him right.

At last, on the 17th December 1600, in the Cathedral of Saint Jean, the Papal Legate gave them his blessing, amid scenes of great rejoicing.

On her arrival Marie had urged her husband to recall the Jesuits; the Legate added his entreaties. Henry, who knew perfectly well that every attack made upon his life had been shown, on enquiry, to have been engineered by the Jesuits, replied with sad irony:

"If I had two lives I would willingly part with one of them to please His Holiness. But as I've only one, I must needs keep it for his service and the welfare of my people."

One day, as he was traversing the cloisters of the Franciscans, Biron had the audacity to ask for an interview. The perfidy of his old companion-in-arms had been a terrible blow to the King. He had known about it for a long time, but had never been willing to take stern measures. He had a soft spot in his heart for his brothers-in-arms, for the men who had stood by him in evil days. He loved them with a manly, strong and boyish affection which women know not of.

Thrice Biron dropped on his knee. The King raised him and put his arms about him. The delinquent knew that his master was aware of all, but he knew the King from of old, knew how tender and indulgent he was. Taking the bull by the horns, he told him about some of the things he had done, mitigating their heinousness by saying he was in love with the Duke of Savoy's daughter, who had been promised him in marriage.

Sadly and patiently Henry heard him through. Then he said: "Maréchal, forget about the whole thing—and so will I!"

On the 17th January, Henry IV put his signature to the treaty

which gave la Bresse to France. Next day he left post-haste, and on the 20th he was sighing in the arms of Henriette.

He had now been married forty days.

For two weeks the Marquise and he could love and fight as fiercely as they liked.

Marie left Lyons a few days after the King. Her noisy cortège moved very slowly and with great precaution over the rough and treacherous roads, for the Queen of France was *enceinte*.

And so was Henriette!

She had won him back again. The Capuchin, that envoy extraordinary, was commanded to hand the Pope the papers regarding the annulment of his marriage to Marie, while Marie herself, never suspecting what was in the wind, was making the best of her way to Paris. But the Pope refused to see the monk, and that personage had a very narrow escape from being walled up in a Roman monastery.

Sully, very much taken with his sovereign lady, whom he had gone to Fontainebleau to welcome, pointed out how impossible it was to put away a Queen who was in hopes of bringing forth a Dauphin.

That was true. The Marquise had to acknowledge that circumstances were too much for her.

Marie arrived in Paris on the 9th February. She was carried in a litter hung with crimson velvet and cloth of silver, borne by two mules. Adorned with Gabrielle's jewels, that glittered in the pale wintry sun, she looked every inch a queen. The whiteness of her complexion, her cold demeanour, the prestige of her name had their effect. The Parisians thought her handsome and, above all, majestic. People like their sovereigns to look majestic. Henry did not look majestic—far from it.

Marie proceeded under triumphal arches, heard the booming of Sully's artillery, received deputations of citizens, passed over the Pont Notre-Dame where the houses, all hung with tricolour banners, were crowded with masked lords and ladies.



MARIE DE' MEDICI

It was then observed that the Queen of France did not know how to smile.

Her heart sank as her gaze fell on the sordid city. Her litter had to progress through what was virtually an open sewer. The smell was so dreadful that she had to keep her gloves, which were scented with Spanish jasmin, continually to her nose.

"If the plague came back again," the doctors gave out when they saw the people filling the streets with refuse, "the population would be wiped out."

The plague was still endemic in Paris. The Hôpital de la Charité had not beds enough for the sufferers, who were packed in the same bed together, several at a time.

On the quays of the Seine, which was covered with ice-floes and driftwood, men who had been terribly wounded in the wars, with sword slashes across their faces, nightmare visages, watched the Queen as she went past on the very verge of fainting.

Loud-mouthed fishwives spoke their mind freely about this bulky queen, with her pasty complexion and staring, goggle eyes. Paris, that is to say the Halles, still had a liking for the Guises, who were Catholics and had an air about them. Henry IV, who was still half a heretic, and his foreign wife were only good to make a bonfire of on the Place de Grève.

"But what in goodness' name is this smell?" stammered Marie, hardly able to breathe.

Riding on horseback on either side the litter, Concini and Don Virginio d'Orsini whispered their reassurances, while the King, cantering on ahead, acknowledged the acclamations of his people with sweeping waves of the royal hat, laughing at every one and everything.

"Your servant, Sir!" "And yours, Sir!" The crowd shouted wildly, and pickpockets took full advantage of the tumult. The corpses that swung with their tongues half out of their mouths on the gallows in the market-places were no deterrent of the popular enthusiasm.

When she arrived at the Louvre, which was but a vast work-

shop, an immense store with the mingled arms of Gabrielle and the King all about the place, Marie burst into a flood of tears behind the mask which she had now resumed.

Nothing was ready for her coming. The rain came in in the bedrooms, where the ceilings were all grimy with smoke. A most overpowering smell of drains clung about the walls and staircases and rose up from the moats half filled with every kind of filth.

The Queen of France was obliged to go into rooms at the Hôtel de Gondi to begin with, and afterwards lodged with another rich compatriot, Zamet, the financier.

The very same day as she took up her quarters at the Louvre, the King presented the Marquise de Verneuil. That she-devil Henriette had always insisted on this official presentation, and Henry, who had been used to seeing royal favourites breathing the same air as the Queen, made no objection to what was really a piece of refined cruelty.

"Madame," he said bluntly to Marie, "this young thing has been my mistress; she wants to be your very special servant."

Marie was wounded, and was very distant. At Florence the relations between the King and the Marquise had been common property. But Henriette had got what she wanted. She now had her *entrée* to the Queen, and would thus be constantly in the King's eye. She knew how fickle he was, and was afraid lest it should be "out of sight, out of mind."

She was seen every day at the Louvre. Every day the Queen could observe, and deeply mortifying must the sight have been, how the favourite's disgraceful pregnancy was progressing.

Already Gabrielle's little bastards were quartered in the palace, quite members of the family. The eldest, César de Vendôme, who was known as César Monsieur, a child of six and beautiful as an angel, had a room immediately below his father's. Henry had sent this child along the Lyons road to meet the youthful bride. A letter had gone on in advance in which he said, "Give my son Vendôme a kiss from me."

On every possible occasion these three golden heads, whom the King loved like his own marrow, were shown off, petted and held up as patterns. In the morning they were carried in and put in the conjugal bed, where the King made a tremendous fuss over them. Marie's naturally sulky and peevish disposition took a definite turn for the worse. She was tall and flabby, with broad hips capable of producing kings enough for the whole of Europe. She was a dull creature, always busy about some futility or another. Unattractive in manner, she was respected by few and loved by none. All that was wanted from her was half a dozen children, and they were not backward in telling her so.

All that was not exactly calculated to improve either her spirits or her temper. She had nothing in common with her husband, who was twenty years her senior. She thought him very old and very unattractive.

Despitet he terms of endearment and the protestations of love which they lavished on each other whenever some hunting engagement happened to separate them, he calling her "M'amie," and she calling him "Cuore mio," they got on very badly together.

"If I want one thing, she wants another. If I think this, she thinks that. I can't stand her always grumbling and nagging at me the moment I come in from town or from hunting. I want to kiss her, caress her, have some fun with her, but she always puts on a face as long as a fiddle, instead of trying to make things bright and cheerful."

He pitched all this into Sully, his everlasting confidant.

Henriette had the best of the game. Compared with the Queen's, her fits of temper were a jollification.

Time and again the King would storm and rave about the hungry crowd of Italians that were always swarming around the Queen. He said she would have to learn French, and insisted on her writing to him in that language. She complied with an ill grace. She felt a complete stranger among these blustering Gascons, and found solace in the calculating affection of her foster-sister and in corresponding with her people in Italy. Right up to

the Dauphin's birth Henry had tried in vain to get her to relinquish the fashions of her country.

Henry sometimes thought of Catherine. Both women came from the same stock, but what a difference between them! Compared with Catherine, who was cunning and cleverness personified, Marie, who was as stubborn as a mule, was a mere numskull whom the dark-skinned Leonora or the crafty Concini could twist round their little fingers. Both she and Catherine were exceedingly ambitious, both were underhanded and sought to gain their ends by the dark and Machiavellian ways that were characteristic of the petty Italian courts. But Catherine had character and, despite three trepannings, a first-class brain. Marie had neither one nor the other.

Around the gold-brocaded robes of the Queen of France there buzzed a dangerous swarm of perfumers and magicians recruited from the ghettos of Florence, a crowd of smooth-tongued courtiers and sycophantic adventurers. The French section of the Court, and in no long time the Parisian malcontents, took sides with the witty Henriette. She had some funny tales to tell, though they were rather hard on the King, about the stodgy, cackling Queen and her gang of scented Italians. She was a wonderful mimic, an accomplishment which amused him as a wit and offended him as a monarch.

For he thought a good deal of his wife, played the husband, soaked himself in perfumes—musk or violet—to please her. He played cards with her, made her presents of little dogs which she doted on, and monkeys and parakeets. He pandered to her every whim because he was expecting his dauphin in a terrible state of impatience and apprehension.

She used to fall out with him, usually for nothing at all. He was always the first to get over it and to say, with a good-natured smile, "Come, my pet, let's be friends again."

THE BIRTH OF A DAUPHIN—AND ANOTHER

THE weather was mild as the September of 1601 drew to its close, and the soft breezes were laden with the scent of the new-mown hay, the last crop of the season, that had fallen beneath the scythe on the lawns at Fontainebleau. The King, lying a-bed beside his Queen, was lost in reverie.

He was thinking how pleasant it would be to go for a gallop in the dewy dawn, with his dogs following and the swallows gliding, or to go and take some peasant's scythe and do some reaping, as he had often done before now in the steep pasturelands of Béarn.

All of a sudden Marie said she was feeling unwell. The King got up with beating heart, rekindled a torch, and went out, clad only in his shirt, to summon the nurse, who was sleeping, fully dressed, in an adjoining room.

It was midnight. The guards were fast asleep and snoring on their mattresses behind the several doors. The officers, having charmed their lady-loves with dulcet serenades, were engaged in performing with the rope-ladder.

The Queen, whimpering and moaning, was weeping copiously.

"*Ie morio! Ie morio!*" she kept saying.

The dark-skinned chambermaid, Leonora, kept kissing her hands, weeping, too, and uttering little plaintive cries. Resolutely the nurse thrust back the crowd and sent the little weeping maid about her business.

"Do exactly what the nurse tells you, my pet," said the King persuasively.

All day long the Queen lay groaning piteously. Henry never left her. He remembered how his own mother, poor, courageous Jeanne d'Albret, when her pains were on, had bravely begun to sing a Béarnese ditty in order not to bring forth a doleful child:

“Nouste daune deu cap deu poun,
Adjudat me à d’aqueste hore!”

About ten o’clock that night the King, who was deep in thought, heard a little mouse-like cry that told him a newcomer had arrived in this vale of tears. His heart knocked at his ribs.

Without a word, the nurse swathed the infant in its swaddling clothes. Very pale, Henry drew near, and looked at the poor little body, so frail and feeble that the nurse feared its life would ebb away.

She called for wine. A serving-man brought her a bottle, which the King took from him with trembling hands.

“Sire,” said the woman, in a grave voice, “if it were anyone else’s child, I should fill my mouth with wine and give it some, for fear this weakness should go on too long.”

Quickly the King raised the bottle and held it to the goodwife’s hairy lips.

“Go on!” he said excitedly. “Never mind whose child it is.”

Had not his own grandfather made him drink Jarançon wine when he was born? Aye, and rubbed his nose with a stump of garlic to make a man of him!

The nurse filled her mouth with wine, and then blew it in between the lips of the new-born babe which, after a while, showed signs of animation. It evidently liked the drink.

The King, whose mien had suddenly changed, looked sadly on. All at once, unable to contain himself any longer, he burst out:

“I can see by your face that it’s a girl. . . .”

“No, Sire, it’s a boy.”

“Midwife, I charge thee, let me not dally with a delusive joy; that would be the death of me. . . .”

She undid the wraps and showed him his son, naked.

Then the King lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed, with clasped hands. Tears big as peas coursed down his hoary beard.

A Dauphin, a Dauphin, a very palpable Dauphin! He was now the chief of a dynasty. The ground which, till then, had seemed to

be failing beneath his feet, was becoming firm once more. He felt strong now, and capable, aye, impatient to strive to safeguard the future of his race which he saw now firmly seated, for generations to come, on that throne, the throne of France, for which he had fought so hard.

Bending down to kiss the babe, he realised that it did not take after the Bourbons. It was not lively enough. The only thing it inherited from them was its feet, the feet of a sturdy marcher. No, little Louis was a thorough Italian. The King stood erect again and his brow was thoughtful.

But the Queen continuing her plaint, he hastened to her side, and smiling through his tears, he kissed her, saying:

"Dearest, you have suffered a deal of pain. But God has vouchsafed us a great boon in giving us what we asked of him. We have a fine baby boy."

"Ohime! Ohime!" she moaned listlessly.

Kneeling down on a velvet cushion beside the bed, he took his wife's hands tenderly in his own, which were warm with a gentle warmth, and kissed them. For now, all resentment, all thoughts of bitterness, all the scorn he had inwardly felt for his fat and stupid wife were far away.

Rising to his feet, he went and opened the door to admit the crowd of people who were waiting impatiently without. A noisy, flattering throng immediately surged into the room where the tired mother was lying. At this the midwife loudly protested.

"There are two hundred people here," said she. "'Tis a hundred and ninety-nine too many!"

But the King, bursting with pride and joy, tapped her familiarly on the shoulder.

"Hold thy peace, woman. Be not angered. This child belongs to all. 'Tis meet that all should rejoice!"

After a time he dismissed them all, in order to give admission to another batch who were waiting to behold and admire the Dauphin.

The whole château was swarming with people. Serving-men in

red, white and blue liveries went in and out among them, crying, "Peace! Peace," but all in vain. In the gallery a deputation of Paris folk, always prompt to fight, to riot or to melt with pity, had just arrived and demanded to see their future King, to offer him their homage and their gifts. Their fine velvet clothes were spotted with the drippings from candles that had just flickered out in the wan light of an autumn dawn.

The King, deeply moved, picked up his puling babe, and lifting it on high, displayed it to his people.

The foreign ambassadors made a brilliant group. The ambassador of Spain, Spain, the old enemy who, despite treaties, was always in the path, always at the bottom of every conspiracy and every war, now came forward. A daughter had just been born to the King of Spain.

Marie was very anxious for a Spanish alliance. Henry IV, hungering for peace and a reign of universal good-fellowship, raised the ambassador to his feet, and having received his congratulations, said to him playfully:

"It would seem, Monsieur, as though Providence were fain to tighten the bonds of friendship that already exist 'twixt France and Spain by giving a son to the one and a daughter to the other, thus hinting at a future alliance which would lay the foundations of a lasting peace."

Then, for emotions sap one's strength, the King went off to dinner and to write a letter to the woman whom the Queen with unbounded scorn called "*Questa poutana*" (that strumpet), telling her that he had again become a father.

As the day was getting on, he went off to do some stag-hunting. In the midst of the chase he suddenly reined in his horse and grew pale with joy. A distant muffled sound went booming on beneath the russet branches of the forest. It was the guns of Paris saluting the Dauphin.

A week later the King, with due ceremony, departed from the Queen's bedside and returned to Paris to attend to affairs of State. Thereafter he came back again to his hunting in the forest.

In the Château de Verneuil, Henriette was awaiting her confinement, gnashing her teeth at the thought of the rejoicings that were taking place over the birth of this spurious Dauphin.

Meanwhile her lover was burning with impatience.

"My dearest dear, I have arrived here safe and sound save for this love-sickness which is so sweet to bear that if I were free to choose the manner of my death, I fain would die of it. Dear heart, it seems like a century since I said good-bye to you."

Notwithstanding these delights, he showed himself more attentive and assiduous than ever towards his wife. The Dauphin was growing visibly, but still remained listless. He was not yet a month old when the King whispered to the Marquise:

"I believe my wife is pregnant again. Make haste and bring forth this son of yours, in order that I may give you a daughter. Good-bye, my love. I love you more, a thousand times more, than ever I did. A million kisses."

It is the 4th November, in one of the bedrooms of the Château de Verneuil, a bedroom exactly similar to that occupied by the Queen of France at the Louvre: pictures painted on woodwork, picked out with gilt, Henry's own crest, furniture upholstered in red velvet, Oriental carpets, a canopied bed—

"Now you may be off, nurse. I will finish your work."

A new-born infant, a very lively one this time, was kicking and squealing vigorously in his arms. His beard was prickly and the brat felt it.

"Is it a boy?" asked the Marquise, snug in bed.

"Aye, and a fine one, my sweetheart."

A look of triumph passed over Henriette's delicate features. A son. There was hope then!

However, there were no rejoicings elsewhere in the vast château. You would have thought it was deserted. The King, deeply moved, was the only one to go into ecstasies over young Gaston Henri, Marquis de Verneuil.

"Dear heart," he murmured, approaching the bed, "the son you

red, white and blue liveries went in and out among them, crying, "Peace! Peace," but all in vain. In the gallery a deputation of Paris folk, always prompt to fight, to riot or to melt with pity, had just arrived and demanded to see their future King, to offer him their homage and their gifts. Their fine velvet clothes were spotted with the drippings from candles that had just flickered out in the wan light of an autumn dawn.

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"Dear heart," he murmured, approaching the bed, "the son you

have given me is finer than the Queen's. He's a real Bourbon, he is; whereas the other is fat and swarthy, like a Medici."

The Marquise, so young to be a mother and so adorable in her disarray, answered in a bantering, disdainful tone:

"That's because your fat banker got the seed for hers from Italy."

The King's brow clouded.

"I pray you," he said, "vex me not to-day."

She essayed to smile. Holding her infant in her arms, she put to him this question:

"Captain of France, what present dost thou confer on this fine son of ours?"

"I will legitimise him, and they will make him a bishop."

A fine present that, in good sooth! He had already done as much for Gabrielle's.

"He will be the one and only real Dauphin of France," she said severely, proudly tossing her little dark head. She knew full well that, as the conditions had not been fulfilled, the promise did not hold, but she refused to admit it.

Henry shrugged his shoulders. What did it avail her thus to harp on this eternal claim of hers?

"For the moment," he said, "our son asks nothing better than his nurse's dug to suck. 'Sblood, how eager the bratling is! Know you, my pet, I sucked eight nurses dry?"

When, hardly containing himself for joy, he saw the infant glued tightly to a well-filled breast, he went back to the mother and sat down on the bed. She held out her arms yearningly, pathetically:

"You have robbed me of all. . . . You abused your royal power. You dishonoured me. I am despised, a laughing-stock—well, *that* I can bear. But my little one! Are your sins to be visited on this unhappy child? Oh, God will punish you."

The King rose, with clouded brow. He knew well enough that every child that was born to him was a firebrand the more for France. All bastards grow into sedition-mongers. A deep melancholy settled on him. Silently he paced the room with long strides, a prey to consuming anxieties.

Henriette realised that it would not do to press the matter at the moment. The urchin's future would be settled betwixt a kiss and a *bon mot*. And so she said no more, but burying her beautiful head in the pillow, burst into a flood of tears.

The King rushed to her side. He could not bear to see anyone weeping. He kissed her, said she should have a very splendid diamond, and made her countless promises. At this tender moment, while his mistress lay with her hair in wild disorder on the pillow, he yielded at long last, and said that she should sit one day beneath the royal canopy.

A little later some broth was brought in for the invalid. She pouted a little at this, for she was hungry as a hunter. Why couldn't she have a proper supper? The King, too, was sharp set. A table was laid in the room. The King, for himself, ordered an omelette garnished with garlic.

At Verneuil no ceremonial was observed. Henriette was a clever girl; she never relinquished her claim to the title of Queen, but she knew how to pander to the homely tastes of the plain, straightforward fellow who was King. So Henry IV could pour his *vin d'Arbois* into his soup, if it pleased him so to do; he could suck, no matter how much noise he made, the juicy bones of a capon and dip his bread into the rich gravy of his favourite stews. In an antechamber hard by, a shepherd of the countryside was playing on his pipe; 'twas music that the King loved better than his royal violins.

The spirited little Marquise drank freely, and the wine revived her strength. The King, he followed suit—to the health of Gaston Henry.

Each time, she pursed her lips and exclaimed, as she looked straight at the King, "To France's heir!"

To humour her, he said with a laugh:

"We've seen heirs come from farther off than that. Me, for example."

The wine had gone to her head. She let her tongue wag freely, and sharpened her wit on every member of the Court. She took off the gravest personages in marvellous fashion, and brought out

all their absurdities with such irresistible effect that the King could not give over laughing. He would make her go on; refused to let her rest. It was always so. He never slept when he was with her; and he couldn't bear to be alone, for with solitude came ever a return of his melancholy.

He kept on kissing her good-bye, saying that he really must go, dragging himself reluctantly to the door; then she would say something, something that made him laugh, or stung him to the quick, and so he lingered on, laughing or in a towering passion as the case might be.

He boasted that the night before, he had won twenty thousand pistoles at Zamet's. She bet him she would win them from him, and so they played on the counterpane. She took good care he did not cheat, and gave him the rough side of her tongue when he tried to. An hour or two later she had won the whole twenty thousand pistoles. She made him pay her on the spot, and he had to raise a loan from Bellegarde, his chief equerry, and from Roquelaure, his Grand Master of the Wardrobe, whom he had brought with him and who was sleeping on a straw mattress at the foot of the bed that had been reserved for the King.

When the servants came to extinguish the torches, day was breaking on the leafless trees. The scent of the moist undergrowth stole into the chamber and quickened the King's blood. He always loved the dawn, and soon he was away scouring over the land.

No sooner was he out of doors than he started whistling like a blackbird. After which, with all the force of his lungs, he sang a psalm to the tune of a roundelay.

Marie Touchet at a window in the château scratched a corner of a pane with her finger-nail. She gazed with an expression of profound disapproval on the royal seducer, who wearing a pair of ancient boots, was striding away, deftly kicking from his path the leaves that lay in withered heaps upon the ground.

When the grey doublet, all shiny from long usage, had disappeared into the recesses of the wood, the château came to life.

The Marquise gave orders that the child, who had been entrusted to the care of a nurse in an adjoining room, should be brought back to her. A strange light shone in her eager eyes. Whom was the child like? It was highly important that he should be like Henry IV.

A soft drumming of fingers at her door aroused her from her reverie and told her that her half-brother Charles, the Comte d'Auvergne, the bastard son of Charles IX, asked leave to enter.

He was a young man, tall and pale, afflicted with the same perpetual tremulousness and nervous instability from which his father had suffered. He carried on the paternal tradition by ambushing peaceful travellers and then brutally maltreating them. It was his hobby. Exceeding even his sister in vice, he lived in an atmosphere of intrigue, and his villainies were proverbial.

"Poor child," he murmured in a tone of affected compassion, looking down at the infant.

Then he began walking round and round the bed, making the gold spurs on his high-heeled boots jingle, and nervously fingering a full-blown rose that adorned his doublet of multi-coloured taffeta.

"I am a King's son," he said. "It is I who ought to have succeeded my brother Henry III. This Béarnese renegade has balked me of my birthright. I forgive the wrong that was done to me; but my nephew shall be King.

"Sister," said he, in a wheedling voice—she was looking even paler than himself—"the title of Queen of France is yours, and yours alone. Your son, and none other, ought to be hailed as Dauphin of France."

"What a piece of news!" said Henriette sarcastically.

Then the Comte bent down, and said in a whisper:

"I've had an envoy from the King of Spain. I sent him a copy of Navarre's promise. With his aid and Savoy's, if God so wills, we shall succeed."

Hatred shone in the Marquise's eyes. "God *will* so will, seeing that *I* so will!"

A sinister smile played about her brother's lips.

"One day he'll be coming here in a hurry, as he often does, and we'll cut his throat. As for the Queen, we'll put her in a convent. The Dauphin shall follow his father."

The Marquise looked him straight in the eyes, which always quailed before a steady glance.

"I've a way of achieving the same end, surer and safer far than yours."

"I'm not going to leave the avenging to you," he said, with a sneering laugh. "But enough of this. Do not forget that the King of Spain is willing to recognise your son as Dauphin, and give him a pension of fifty thousand ducats and certain fortified towns. To each of us he will give twenty thousand ducats pension, and two fortresses, to say nothing of other advantages, if the present sovereign of France dies. . . ."

So saying, the Comte d'Auvergne stole from the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. Hardly had he vanished when her sister brought Henriette a letter which she had concealed in her Book of Hours.

"Sister, you make me tremble. Doesn't the King suspect anything, really?"

Henriette broke the seal. It was from her lover, the young and handsome Prince de Joinville; with passionate attention she read it through before she answered her timorous sister.

"Fear not," she said. "Even if the King got to know, he would say nothing. He cannot do without me. . . ."

THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD

HENRIETTE now had her own suite of rooms in the Louvre. That had not been effected without some lively protests from the Queen, and some remonstrances from Sully, who had a pronounced antipathy to royal mistresses.

But . . . the dwarf Leonora had taken it into her head to marry that shady individual Concini, and the King wanted to pack Concini off to Italy. The Queen had intervened, but to no purpose. Leonora then implored the Marquise to intercede for her, promising, if she would do so, to conciliate Marie.

Henriette agreed to the bargain, succeeded in her mission, and was smiled on by the Queen. Every day she sent to enquire for the favourite and told her what presents she had received. And then, to cap it all, she let her come to a ballet that she gave.

The King was pleased. He thought that all would now go well. But the Queen's interesting condition became noticeable; so, soon afterwards, did Henriette's. All the fat was in the fire again.

The two women, who both had great gifts of expression, did not spare one another. They also did some mutual spying. The Court was divided into two clans. The majority sided with the Marquise; she amused them. Foreigners and those of riper years frequented Marie's quarters, where they dozed.

Their pregnancy did not enhance the beauty of the rival ladies. Each said the other was trying to poison her—how reminiscent was that of the old days of Corisande and Margot! Between the two of them, the King found life intolerable. He took refuge in his bird-room or in his garden at the Tuileries, where he was planting mulberry and orange trees. The gardener was in despair.

"Nothing grows in this brickfield, Sire!" said he.

"Plant Gascons, then. They'll grow anywhere!" answered Henry IV.

Sometimes he'd slip away for a day's hunting. Then the prattle, the charm of the children would lure him back to the Louvre, now full of children's cots. Henry was the only one who recalled the tragedies that had been enacted within those sombre walls, the cruel acts of vengeance which had sated themselves with blood. Those five cots—there would soon be seven—brought new life into the old château. They were its light and hope.

Henry was adored by his children. The tiniest little hurt, and they would cry, not for their mother or their nurse, but for their father. He was to be seen airing his pretty little troop in public; taking them to Saint-Germain, where he was building a magnificent terrace; putting Vendôme up on horseback for all the folk at Saint-Germain to admire.

When the conjugal and extra-conjugal squabbles became too hot, the Gay-Gallant would seek solace at the Arsenal with Sully, inviting himself, and taking pot-luck.

"Monsieur is busy in the office," the smart liveried footmen would make answer.

And the King would laugh.

"I didn't suppose he was out hunting, or card-playing, or with the ladies. Isn't it a remarkable thing about that man, that he never gets tired of office work?"

To make sure there was something to eat, the King would go down into the kitchen, gulp down oysters that the cooks opened for him, and wash them down with Arbois wine, which the scullions handed him as if he had been a friend.

With a very big sigh, Sully poached a few thousand pistoles from the royal savings—eight thousand sacks bulging with gold—that had been stored up in the Tower of the Treasury, one of the eight Towers of the Bastille, and placed them on the table in a purse intended for the King, who could never do without his after-dinner game of cards.

Henry was comfortable at his old friend's, so comfortable indeed

that he gave orders for a sitting-room, a bedroom, a dressing-room and a study to be fitted up for his use. "I intend to put in a few days with you every month."

The Marquise, short of money as usual, got leave to levy some taxes. Sully was strongly opposed to such madness.

"It is absurd to think of putting fresh burdens on merchants, mechanics, farm hands and shepherds, who, after all, provide the King and all of us with the necessities of life. They are contented enough with one master and don't want any mistresses on their hands."

The Marquise, greatly incensed, set on a number of different people to attack the worthy man. So successful were her tactics that a quarrel ensued between the King and his trusty friend. Not many days later, however, back came Henry to the Arsenal in apologetic mood.

"She's such a talker, and so full of mischief and invention that, say a single word to her and she'll put a hundred, nay, a thousand to it. My friend, she's got her knife into you. If you're wise you won't go out without an escort, however much it costs you; I should be losing too much if I lost you."

There was such a frightful uproar in the conjugal bedchamber that no one dared go in. Leonora had nothing but the whites of her eyes showing; her teeth were chattering with terror. The courtiers, sitting about on boxes in the antechambers, heard every word of the dispute. They were used to these shouting matches at the Louvre. This one, however, surpassed the limit. They ran to fetch M. de Sully.

He arrived, imperturbable as usual, took off his spectacles, listened a second or two, and then went in, very severe and determined-looking. Marie de' Medici was raising her hand against the King. He was finding it no easy matter to parry the blows, and already his face was all over scratches.

The big round eyes of the spiteful hen lighted on the superintendent.

"Signor Sully," she yelled, "the King's a cuckold."

"Good heavens, Madame!" cried the mediator, much embarrassed, "what's that you say, Madame? What do you tell me you've done?"

"Not me, Signor, not me; that strumpet of a Marquise of his."

"*Ventre-Saint-Gris*, Madame," broke in the King, slapping his thigh with a loud laugh, "horns are like teeth. They're painful when they're coming through, but you laugh when it's all over. I've known all that this many a day."

The Queen was speechless with rage. Thick of skull, as she was of body—she had never been exactly agile in either—she was rapidly becoming one of the "fat and foolish" type.

"Be in the chapel at ten, Monsieur, and you will be given Monsieur de Joinville's love-letters to that wanton of yours."

Sully dragged the King away. His laugh had suddenly ceased.

Henry knew his mistress through and through. He knew that she was capable of anything. He knew her measure, but he loved her all the same. He shut his eyes. He was afraid to know the truth. Alas, you cannot say, in royal language, to the adored one, "Fail to love me at your peril, for such is our will and pleasure."

With teeth clenched tight he awaited the appointed hour, striding up and down the gallery. In the dim, incense-laden atmosphere a masked woman handed him a packet which was like a live coal in his fingers. He knew who the informer was, the sister of Gabrielle d'Estrées, who had once thought she might succeed the dead girl in the King's favour, but had been rebuffed.

So that none should make his royal master's grief the subject of mirth, Sully took him away to the Arsenal. Having read the letters and noted the very fleshly nature of their contents—cries of carnal hunger which the faithless one had wrung from de Joinville—and when the whole betrayal had become patent to his eyes, he sent La Varenne to Henriette to upbraid her to her face and to tell her that he would never see her again.

That limb of Satan never blenched.

"As I am quite sure that I have never done anything at which the

King could take offence, I am unable to conjecture why he treats me thus harshly. I hope that the truth will bear me out against those who have spread these lying reports."

Thereupon the Marquise withdrew to Verneuil. She knew that her absence would be the greatest of ills for her royal adorer. Losing no time, she got into touch with Bellegarde, Gabrielle's one-time lover, and it was arranged that he was to swear that the tale-bearer had got her lover, whose writing was exactly like de Joinville's, to forge the letters.

Meanwhile the Queen, overjoyed, reigning at last without a rival, revived the gay and charming squadron of maids-of-honour and gave dancing performances for the King.

Catherine used to think that, to keep the Court gentlemen quiet, it was necessary, in default of fighting, to give them some amusement twice a week, a ball, a supper, a match on horseback or on foot, or a tilting competition. Marie adopted this wise policy, but with a circumspection not precisely popular with the members of this rather profligate Court. All this was in striking contrast to the licentious dances which Catherine had encouraged, ballets in which young girls had appeared half naked, with chaplets of flowers on their unbraided tresses. Now subject and setting were always marked by extreme propriety, as, for example, the Ballet of the Sixteen Virtues, in which Marie herself took a part.

Her six maids-of-honour, arrayed all alike in dresses of cloth of silver, were very carefully looked after, for the young bloods who were the King's boon companions stuck at nothing. No licence was permitted. The Queen refused to permit any moral laxity in others. One of her young women who had admitted her lover to her room one night was summarily dismissed. The lover was condemned to death. But the gallant got away in his shirt, and was never recaptured.

The King consented to attend these ballets in state, that is to say, in rich attire: silken hose, satin doublet, a white plume in his hat kept in place by a white amethyst, a sash blazing with diamonds

across his breast, a velvet cloak with a hood about his shoulders. He went, but with a melancholy, far-off look in his eyes. His heart was elsewhere. Fiddlers, lutanists and singers tried to charm away his sadness, but in vain. Such a concentration of all the virtues ended by sending him off to sleep.

During the carnival, masquerades and balls succeeded one another without a break. The King would go on dancing rounds and minuets till four in the morning. Sully was also a dancer. The gravest of the grave, all the greybreads gave themselves up to mirth and folly. In fancy-dress displays, the little Duke of Vendôme appeared as Cupid.

Then the Court betook itself to the Pont Notre-Dame, where tilting at rings and other matches were held. At night they listened to operas which Marie had imported from Italy, or forgathered at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where farces were enacted. The King laughed till he cried, while the Court stood by aghast, for the players spared no one's feelings, telling home-truths to all and sundry. Henry would not allow them to be interfered with.

But it was only there that the King laughed. Consumed with love, he waited and waited for a word from the Marquise. But she, as heartless as she was fair, maintained a haughty silence.

Hardly a day passed but the King went to see his masons, who were just finishing the Pont-Neuf. He bandied jests with them and enquired if they lacked for anything. Then he would go and shoot magpies on the Pré-aux-Clercs, exchanging badinage with the boatmen of the bridges and the porters of the Port-aux-Foins. And he would come back with a dreamy look in his eyes and a song on his lips:

Jean Foutaquin, pour du pain et pour des poires,
Jean Foutaquin, pour des poires et pour du pain.

Or else he would go off on some wild wolf-shooting expedition. Being troubled with gout in the big toe, he simply cut away the upper part of his boot in order to ease the discomfort. He looked like a beggar compared with the brilliant suite of place-hunting

lords about him. Those gilded parasites wearied him to death. He sent them packing to their châteaux, but they stuck to him like limpets. He took his revenge—in cutting words.

One night he was riding homeward with a few of these assiduous lords, when they fell in with an old woman leading a cow. He bargained with her for the animal.

“I can see well enough that you’re no cattle-dealer, Sire!”

“Why shouldn’t I be, mother? Don’t you see all these calves I’ve got along with me?”

There were still bickerings in the royal household. When they slept together in their great State bed, before which, even when it was empty, the courtiers had to bare their heads and bow, and speak in muted tones, husband and wife would quarrel and then turn back to back. In the end the King had a single bed put up for him in an adjoining room and slept alone. He did not like it.

His ordinary companions—Bellegarde, Bassompierre, Roquelaure and La Varenne—would come and play cards at his bedside, or else they would all slip out together on the quiet, and go and disport themselves with buxom wenches in the watermen’s taverns, or with the trulls of the rue du Renard.

Marie was more strict about the virtues of her maids-of-honour than she was about her own. Concini, Don Virginio d’Ursin, or Orsini, as they called him, and Bellegarde were reputed to have enjoyed her favours. But she was cold-blooded and vain, and what she sought for more than anything else was flattery. She would have liked to be serenaded, as her rival was so liberally. She would beam with pleasure at the most barefaced compliments. It needed but a young and handsome lordling with frizzed hair to approach her and say with a bow, “Bella, Bellissima,” and she would straightway take him under her wing.

The King’s unfaithful conduct was wounding to her *amour-propre*. Yet she did nothing to win his love; rather the reverse. The moment she woke up, she began to exhibit her native rancour. You could hear her jealous, yapping tongue a long way off.

Leonora, now official mistress of the wardrobe, would shower passionate kisses on her hands, those carefully tended, pale hands, those hands of death, those sinister, Medici hands—and with her mistress called down imprecations on the head of that graceless husband, that thorough-paced debauchee, the King of France.

Often Marie would take medicine and stay in bed, attended by apothecaries bearing clysters, and physicians who felt her pulse. Leonora, kneeling on a cushion beside the bed, would amuse her with the tittle-tattle of Court and town, or else set her up against this body or that. The King had tried in vain to get his wife away from the influence of this little Blackamoor.

When the waiting-women came in to see to the Queen's toilet, Leonora disappeared into the wardrobe. Into a tiny silver bowl a little water was poured from a vase of the same metal. A corner of a towel was then dipped in the water and, seated before a Venetian mirror, the Queen would wash herself. Sometimes she would have a bath, although that demanded mighty preparations. A whole army of footmen, accompanied by archers, had to go in solemn procession and fetch hot water from the kitchens. Then they did her hair, powdering it, after duly oiling it to make the powder stick.

Then Leonora reappeared, a gown of rich red satin, embroidered with pearls and diamonds, over her arm. A chemise of the finest linen was passed over the Queen's head; next came her silken stockings woven in three colours, and drawers adorned with gold and silken trimmings. When she had got on her petticoat and stays, the astrologers, magicians, perfumers and engravers of precious stones were admitted. It was the fateful moment, when they told her what they had seen concerning her during the watches of the night, or interpreted her dreams, or exhibited some new perfumes and the latest things in jewellery.

Next came the shoemakers, for she was inordinately proud of her plump white feet. Finally the tumultuous troop of dwarfs, dogs, children and Italian dandies, all pomaded and burbling, came surging in. After that a Book of Hours adorned with miniatures

and covered in black velvet would be put into her hands, and she would proceed to her private chapel.

Her conscience was always troubling her. She was for ever worrying her confessors and begging dispensations of the Pope, took relics to bed with her, showered presents in profusion on convents, astrologers and sorcerers, and trembled like a frightened child at the fantastic stories Leonora narrated to her.

The cunning mistress of the wardrobe had a room immediately over the Queen's apartments, and every night the Queen went up to her.

Concini did not sleep there; the King refused to allow it. No sooner did the shout of the archer come echoing through the palace courts on the very stroke of eleven, than the Italian departed to his house across the river. Gradually the two greedy adventurers had managed to secure the dismissal of all the other Italian courtiers. But Don Virginio Orsini was perpetually cropping up.

Marie seldom went with the King on his hunting expeditions. When she went about in Paris, to convents or shops, she drove, masked, in her gilded coach with its curtains of red damask, drawn by six white horses and accompanied by pages wearing her blue-and-white livery.

She could not get used to Paris, to its foetid mud, its dreadful charnel-house smells. Troops of savage dogs roamed at large and chased people down the dim alley-ways. Plague and smallpox were raging now unchecked.

Henry IV ordered plans to be prepared for a new hospital which he intended to dedicate to Saint Louis.

"God," he used to say, "has entrusted this people to me that I may cherish them as my own children."

One gets used to anything. The young lords got used to dressing themselves up to represent corpses, and had the walls in their châteaux painted with the Dance of Death. It gave an added zest to life.

A pinch of ashes smeared on the forehead cured every one of the

carnival fever. Lent, and a very strict one, was now beginning. Few and far between were occasions for mirth in the ancient abode of kings.

That evening, Henry had given the password for the night to the Captain of the Guard—"Love is Life," it ran—and was now playing a game of cards in his bedroom. A gentleman was holding the candle so that the King might see what cards he held, when the Captain of the Guard returned, bringing a letter that had just been put in his hands by a messenger from Henriette. The King read it through like a man transfigured. In desperate haste he called for his cloak, and then, alone, eager and young once more, consumed with longing, he sped forth through the darkness to the trysting-place his mistress had assigned to him in order that she might speak in her own defence.

How could he have helped being convinced? That little demon of darkness had such irresistible means of persuasion.

Next morning, weary but not satiated, he appeared at the Louvre again. The tempestuous *liaison* began anew, more powerfully than ever. The victorious one came back with her head erect, back to the palace, more insolent and more haughty than before.

Gabrielle's sister received orders to remain at home for the future, while handsome young de Joinville had to betake himself to Hungary to fight against the Turks. Hostilities began again, upsetting the Court, which became such a hell that the culprit, driven beyond endurance, avoided it more than ever. Marie refused to see him. Things came to such a pitch that both of them became mutually afraid for their lives. They ceased to take their meals together, and if the King offered his wife some new dish from his table, she sent it away untasted.

Soon Henry, informed of seditions and risings that were being hatched in Limousin and Poitou, hurried down to the Loire, for he was always on the spot. On reaching Blois, the Queen declared she would go no farther. She wanted to return to Fontainebleau,

where she had an assignation with Don Virginio, who was just back from a journey.

The King endeavoured, quite kindly, to induce her to forgo this plan, but she was obstinate, and angrily flung Henriette in his face. He lost patience at last, and flew into a mighty rage.

"I'll put up with it no longer," he burst out to Sully. "I'll rout her out of this and send her back to her own damned country!"

"That would be well enough if she had no child, Sire," replied that man of peace. "Your Majesty overcame your enemies by your strong right arm. May we not expect then, that you will put an obstinate and peevish woman in her place?"

Henry IV's Recorder-General used to say:

"If a man deceives me oncc, may he be accursed of God! If he deceives me twice, may he be accursed of God and me! But if he deceives me thrice, let me be accursed of God!"

How many times now had the King forgiven Biron? For a long time his indulgence as a leader—as a leader who knew life and how vacillating is the human heart—had been misconstrued.

To begin with, in Catherine's time, the traitor's father had been the most cruel adversary of the young King of Navarre. But on the death of Henry III he had acknowledged him as King of France, together with all his Catholic and Royalist following, and had laid down his life in his service. The son, a great, upstanding, fighting man, as big as a bull and as strong, was as proud as he was daring. He had got thirty-five wounds when fighting under the command of Henry IV.

He never forgot that. The King may have saved his life at Fontaine-Française, may have heaped benefits upon him, have made him Marshal, Duke and Peer of France, and then Governor of Burgundy, a frontier province; all this was as nothing to this proud, unquiet spirit. To have helped to put this kinglet of Navarre on the throne of France, while he himself remained with a mere provincial governorship, did not appeal to him at all. He wanted more than that. And carrying on secret negotiations with Savoy and Spain, he had promised to open the frontier to their forces.

As leader of the Catholic party, he reckoned that the crown would devolve on him. With this in mind, he became excessively devout. No sooner did he perceive a village cross, even a broken one, than he would alight from his horse and crawl towards it on all fours in order to kiss the wood. But he could not say an "Our Father." He put all his faith in astrology, consulted sorcerers and adepts of the Black Art, and read all the prophetic almanacs, which at that time were printed in considerable quantities throughout Christendom.

Since the Coronation, he had conceived a bitter hatred of the King, making waxen images in his likeness and piercing them through the heart, while calling on the Devil to compass his death.

"Impious King, thou shalt perish!"

The country was swarming with these hungry malcontents.

Old Biron, the father, once put a telling question to his bold companions-in-arms, men who had won the kingdom for Navarre at the point of the sword, for Navarre, who was more of a "down and out" than any of them. "What," he said, "will be the good of us when there are no more wars?" Peace, in very truth, brought them little luck. They became conspirators to a man, and made a hobby of coining false money.

"If I don't die on the scaffold," said Biron, who was up to his eyes in debt, "I shall give up the ghost in hospital."

He had tried to drag in the leader of the Protestants, who were also disaffected, the elegant Turenne, now Duke of Bouillon, Marguerite's former lover at Nérac. But the reform ministers still preferred a renegade and thankless King to a Catholic bandit-chief, an ally of Spain, mother of the Inquisition, which burnt and tortured heretics every day.

Some months before, Henry IV, who was better at judging men than at punishing them, had sent Biron as envoy-extraordinary to Elizabeth, who was growing anxious about the Spanish menace to the coast of Flanders.

"I send you the keenest weapon of my victories," said he, what

time he listened with anxious brows from the topmost walls of Calais to the thunder of the Spanish guns bombarding Ostend.

Neither kindness, nor fair words—nothing availed to curb his mad ambition, to stay his fatal progress along the path of doom.

Elizabeth, a king in petticoats, was well aware of the disorders and factions by which France was rent, and, being well versed in the art of ruling, she led Biron to a window in her palace and pointed out to him the head of her handsome young favourite Essex, which had been exposed there for six months past. For seventeen years Essex had been her lover. She had adored him, but he played the traitor, and the Queen, an old woman of sixty-eight, signed his death-warrant without a tremor.

"It was pride that brought him low," she said to the envoy-extraordinary, looking him through and through. "He thought he was indispensable. And this was his reward. If the King of France takes my advice, he will do over there what we have done in London—he will cut off the heads of all his traitors."

All along she had been opposed to the clemency displayed by Henry IV. At a time when cruelty and ruthlessness flourished among kings and rulers, this merciful King was a phenomenon.

But what is the good of talking to the deaf? Biron continued his intrigues with Spain and Savoy, and, as traitors are inevitably betrayed by some other traitor, the Maréchal was sold by one of his agents.

At first the King refused to believe the contents of the incriminatory letters. Howbeit, Limousin began to show signs of revolt, and the disaffection soon spread to other provinces. Henry was compelled hurriedly to proceed south of the Loire in order to pacify the rebels who had been in the pay of Biron.

Other letters from the Maréchal, informing Spain of the French King's activities and designs, were also seized. There was a meeting of the Council, and the King was called upon to take measures of the utmost severity. If the sedition-mongers were not punished with a firm hand, then France would again be delivered over to

fire and sword, a prey to warring factions. An example must be made. The ringleader must be struck down.

With a heavy heart, Henry wrote and asked his old comrade-in-arms to come and see him at Fontainebleau.

"I don't believe a word," he said, "of the allegations made against you. I will hand you over these lying accusations. I love you, and I always shall."

Without definitely refusing, Biron found various pretexts for delay.

"If you don't come, I shall send people to bring you," said the King at last.

The man who had betrayed him swore to the Maréchal that the King could have nothing tangible to go on. Then again, Biron's recklessness, his daring and splenetic disposition always impelled him to rash and adventurous undertakings. He started out post-haste for Fontainebleau.

It was six in the morning. The King, up betimes, was taking a turn or two with some of his gentlemen in the garden.

"He will not come, messieurs," he said.

Then, all of a sudden, he changed colour. There was Biron, coming towards him.

"Ah," he thought bitterly, "why have you come, Maréchal? I would far rather have known you beyond my reach! Don't you see I shall have to come down on you this time?"

Then, mastering his emotion, he managed to say, "Ah! Here is the Maréchal de Biron."

The delinquent came on and made his bow, not without a touch of *hauteur*. But at the outset he was a little disconcerted, for Henry did not be-cousin him as was his wont. Nor did he invite him to be covered. The two of them walked up and down for a long time, talking of anything and nothing. The King pointed out his new buildings and his gardens.

"If he speaks out, if he makes a clean breast of it all, I'll forgive him," he said to himself.

But Biron did not speak out.

The King was unwilling to hand him over to the law. Between comrades-in-arms, between a good master and a thoughtless servant, couldn't matters be put right in a friendly spirit? The hour for dinner came. Biron had said nothing. The King greeted him coldly.

The Maréchal, alarmed at the King's unwonted coldness, thought of taking to flight during the night. But a company of light-horse were guarding him, though he knew it not.

The King, tormented by insomnia, sent for him at two in the morning, just as he was putting on his riding-boots in order to get away. He was not received until day dawned. Taking him by the arm, the King again dragged him into the garden, and there, close to the aviary, he told him all he knew about his treachery.

"I sent for you to clear the whole thing up; to talk with you as man to man. Keep nothing back. I am just as good a master as you always found me."

The Maréchal never dreamt that he had any definite proof.

"Never," he said, beating his breast with vehemence, "have I entertained a single evil thought against Your Majesty, much less given effect to such a thought; that I swear to God."

Seeing that he could get nothing out of him, Henry IV left it at that.

"Be it so, Maréchal," said he, with an inscrutable look on his face.

And both of them went off to a game of tennis. Afterwards, for four long hours, the King paced the gallery alone, his hands behind him, his head sunk on his breast, in painful meditation.

The Council became pressing. Henry made up his mind to have Biron arrested, since he obstinately refused to confess his guilt. He also determined to imprison the Comte d'Auvergne, Henriette's brother, who was discovered to be mixed up in the affair.

However, the King wanted to have one more talk with Biron.

"I don't want to destroy the man," he said sadly. "Do not arrest him, gentlemen, unless you think he deserves to die."

The Council said that such attempts—and they had irrefutable proofs of this one—were deserving of death.

"I want to have just one more talk with him, to tell him that, once he lets the law get hold of him, he must not expect any interference from me."

When evening came, he said to the Queen:

"Make up a four for a game of prime; the Maréchal will be there. I myself want to play chess."

But he soon gave up his game, and began walking up and down, his brow furrowed, lost in thought, so absorbed that he whistled and danced without knowing it. The courtiers scented something grave in the air. At the Queen's table, Biron, who seemed ill at ease, lost heavily, and, when he won, forgot to pick up his money.

In the middle of the game a friend of his told him that too many guards and musketeers had been coming into the castle since early in the evening, and that there was a rumour they were going to imprison him.

When midnight struck, the King put an end to the game and sent every one away except the Maréchal and a couple of lords.

In the gallery was a statue depicting him triumphing over his enemies. Pointing to it, and taking hold of Biron's arm, he said:

"Well, cousin, if the King of Spain had seen me like that, what would he have said?"

"Sire, that wouldn't have frightened him at all," answered Biron jauntily.

The King's face darkened. The Maréchal, thinking he had gone too far, added:

"I mean, Sire, if he had seen this statue here; not you in person."

"I see, Monsieur le Maréchal."

He took him away into his room and, familiarly, as in the old days, undressed in his presence, urging him to confess the truth.

"Make up your mind to enlighten me on all the points I have put to you and it shall go well with you. I alone shall know about it. But if it comes into court, I can do nothing to stay the course of justice."

Biron flew into a rage.

'Sdeath, Sire, I can say no more than I have said. I did not come here to defend myself, but to learn the names of my accusers. Tell me who they are. Tell me that, I say!"

His sword at his side, he advanced, and so quickly that the King, who was at the moment seated on his commode, got up.

"I see," he said, "I shall get nothing out of you. I will go and find the Comte d'Auvergne and see what he will tell me."

He gave him good night, grief-stricken, with many an inward groan.

Biron went out boiling with rage. The King, white as a sheet and quite undone, opened the door once more. If only the traitor would change his mind and speak! But Biron only gave him an insolent stare. His master closed the door again, exclaiming in despair:

"Farewell, Baron de Biron. . . . You know what I told you."

"Baron"—it was the title he bore in the old days when they both used to share the same tent.

No sooner was he alone in his quarters than the traitor perceived the Captain of the Guards advancing towards him.

"Monsieur le Maréchal," said he, "hand me your sword. It is the King's command."

Dumbfounded, Biron gave a hurried glance out of the window. The courtyards were swarming with musketeers, fully armed. They were old soldiers, almost all of whom had served under his orders, and who liked him because he set no limit to their depredations. And now it was they who were helping to bring their former leader to a felon's death.

"Ha, I pray you, let me speak to the King," he implored, seeing he was lost.

"Too late, Monsieur," said the officer inexorably. "His Majesty has retired."

"Ah, my sword, my sword that hath done so much good service!" he exclaimed, as he gave it up to the officer.

Biron's kinsfolk, who knew that he was guilty, hastened to intercede with their sovereign for his life.

"If it were but myself I had to think of," said the King sadly, "I should forgive him, as indeed I do forgive him with all my heart. But I must think of the country to whom I owe so much, and of the children I have brought into the world, for they might reproach me for having wittingly left a tare in my kingdom if I gave way now. My life, the welfare of my children, the safety of my kingdom are at stake. I shall now let the law take its course, but I shall do my utmost to substantiate his innocence."

In the Bastille, Biron continued to fulminate and hurl insults against his royal master.

"This outlaw," he cried, "excommunicate and disinherited as he is, who is partly beholden to me for the crown he wears—shall he deliver me into the pitiless hands of justice? Will he not remember the services I rendered him in the past? Will his heart be ever deaf to the prayers of the soldier who entreates his pardon and his mercy?"

When he realised that nothing save the King's proverbial forbearance could stand between him and death, he humbled himself and renewed his prayer for mercy.

"If ever Your Majesty, whose victories were ever graced by clemency, were desirous of signalling and making memorable your goodness by a single, outstanding act of mercy, now is the hour to show it forth by granting life and liberty to his most humble servant whose birth and fortune had foreshadowed a death more honourable than that which now confronts him. I am your creature, Sire, brought up and honourably nurtured in war by your liberality and valorous wisdom. I was a brigadier and you made me a marshal of France, a baron, and you made me a duke, a common soldier, and you made me a captain. Your battles, great and small, were the school in which, obeying you as my King, I learned to exact obedience from others. Suffer me not, Sire, to perish in such wretched case, grant me to live that I may die in the midst of your armies. I appeal to your sense of compassion that it

may be great, even as my misfortune is great. I pray you to forget my delinquency and to bear in memory only the services which I and my father have rendered you. Let me not, Sire, send forth my sighs in vain. . . .”

The King, desperate, in a high fever, shaking from head to foot, seemed nearer to death than his disloyal friend.

The law pronounced its verdict.

“These flames of ambition must be extinguished unless we wish to see the whole country in a blaze.”

That meant death.

Biron sent to ask Sully to intercede for him with the King. Sully refused. The condemned man asked to see his kinsfolk. None came. Every one was abandoning him.

The scaffold was erected in the courtyard of the Bastille.

When the executioner presented himself, Biron roared at him, saying:

“If you come near me, I’ll strangle you. I will go freely to my death. I will not be bound. It shall never be said that I was bound like a thief or a slave!”

Addressing the soldiers who were guarding the gate, he said:

“Friends, I should be greatly obliged if you would put a volley into me, for how pitiable it were to die so miserably and by a blow so shameful.”

On the scaffold he bandaged and unbandaged his eyes three times, always thinking he would see his pardon coming. At the last moment he refused to kneel. He wanted, he said, to receive his death-blow standing up.

The executioner shook with terror as he contemplated his prisoner, unbound and so powerful he could break an arquebus in two with one hand.

At last the executioner, in quavering tones, asked him to kneel and commend his soul to God. The traitor consented, but could not say his prayers, for he had never learnt them. It was then that, availing himself of the chance offered, the executioner seized his

heavy sword and struck with all his force. The traitor's head bounced and rolled off, falling at the foot of the scaffold.

That night they were going to bury him at the monastery of the Celestinians, but the monks refused to receive the body of the man who had once been leader of the Catholic party.

When they came to bring news of the execution to the King, they could not gain admittance to his room. Surrounded by his doctors, he was delirious and raving, calling on the dead man, the valiant comrade of his earlier days.

"Biron!" he shouted. "Biron, help! Biron, you old rascal, you! Biron! Biron! Biron! To horse! To horse, away!"

JOYS AND SORROWS OF THE KING OF FRANCE

TRY as he might, La Rivière, physician and alchemist, could do nothing to stop the terrible gastric flux that was sapping the King's strength.

Even powdered mummy seemed to have no effect against the astral poison to which it was thought his malady was due. The other doctors, in their long robes, after prolonged and serious consultations held in the Latin tongue, proceeded to purge and to douche him till he was at his last gasp.

Dysentery and fever relaxed their hold on Henry IV, only to get a firmer grip of him. Those blue eyes of his, that used to smile so gaily, were now grim and sunken, his brow was furrowed with wrinkles. His cheeks were gaunt and haggard, his teeth were falling out. Alas, Long Nose was only too appropriate an epithet, for his nose now almost came in contact with his chin. He began to look more like a satyr than ever, but his pained expression and his slightly drawn mouth told of the suffering within.

No sooner did his health show signs of improvement than he must needs hoist himself into the saddle and be off again on some long journey to settle disaffection in one or other of his provinces. Knowing him to be ill, they all took matters pretty much as they liked, and the provincial governors again assumed the role of petty princelings. He summoned them to come to him. But they would not deign to bestir themselves, and he wrote to them in these words:

"Come and see me, and come with mind made up to do my will, for the servant who desires to be loved by his master shows him complete obedience. I am not angry yet. Pray do not make me so."

Returning to Fontainebleau, he could not resist eating some of those delicious white melons they call pompons, and apricots from

his gardens. He got better and departed for Rouen, where he partook of oysters sprinkled with new white wine. This brought about a relapse.

They put him on a diet, but he could not do without his late supper: toast and wine, partridges, garlic soup, or merely bread and onion, true soldier's fare.

At the end of the year 1602, his wife presented him with a daughter, Elisabeth, the future Queen of Spain. Two months later, his mistress made him the father of another daughter: Gabrielle-Angélique de Verneuil, afterwards Duchess d'Épernon.

While composing the horoscope of the two little princesses, the astrologers observed that the stars were unpropitious to the King.

The King was passing through a period of severe mental depression which plunged him into a condition of profound melancholy, ill-concealed beneath an air of assumed gaiety. He was a lonely man. His old friend, the friend who had always backed him up, Elizabeth the mighty Queen of England, had just departed.

All the level-headed people, all the people capable of taking the long view, were now no more. The kings that were left were the merest nonentities. All Europe looked on the King of France with awe and admiration, on Henry the Great, the whilom outlaw of the Church, the only sovereign who had won his kingdom by the sword, the last of a valiant race, the last of the epic kings. And now he himself was ill at ease. A king is but a man, and a man more luckless than the general run because he has no disinterested friend, and no woman that loves him for himself alone. He is in truth in a sorry plight. Henry suffered profoundly from the loneliness which besets the head that wears a crown.

He knew how to read the hearts of men, and nothing escaped his searching glance. Ah, how often would it have pleased him better had the truth been hidden from his gaze!

In whom, among the people around him, could he put his trust? In none, it might be, but the great-hearted Sully; Sully, whom the greedy courtiers had come to nickname "Master No," because he

could not be brought to return a "Yes" to their insatiable demands for money. Sully was a strict, plain-living man, with a high conceit of himself withal. He was incorruptible, and yet wealth came his way.

Henry's sleep was broken. Sometimes, at the dead of night, he seemed to catch unwonted sounds; he thought he heard the Dark Huntsman, who had appeared to him once as he was following the hounds beneath the spreading boughs in the Forest of Fontainebleau.

"Dost thou expect me?" cried the sable form, amid the wild, unearthly wind that brought the branches crashing down to earth.

Aye, he expected him! Every minute he expected the assassin's blow.

Kings seldom die a natural death. Oh, to die on the field of battle, drunk with the joy of victory, that is a glorious thing, a death to long for! Henry was a brave man, ever the first to fling himself into the foeman's ranks. But the assassin's knife, the knife he felt to be upraised against him—that was a sordid, ignoble death!

He was not beloved of the people. The common folk, whom he loved, for whom he had done more than ten kings put together, always disliked him whole-heartedly. It was given out that he ruled very ill, that he upset everybody, offending the great and oppressing the lowly, that he was ignobly avaricious and that he lavished money on his mistresses. They longed to see the last of him. There were monks who still went on laying down in their sermons that it was lawful to kill him, promising the joys of Paradise to those who should make away with him.

In the eyes of Europe he was Henry the Great; even the Moham-medans called him great; but to his own subjects he was but *le Vert-Galant*.

Often, on his magnificent terrace at Saint-Germain, he would interrupt a conversation with his masons to turn his gaze on the mist that hung over Paris, that vast and mysterious city wherein his enemies found harbourage. In how many houses were

there people imploring the powers of darkness to remove him: Alchemists and their laboratories were springing up everywhere. There were as many as thirty thousand sorcerers in France.

All this widespread dislike of him was fanned to fever-heat by means of pricking effigies made in his likeness and by all manner of evil incantations to work his ruin. This black magic made him shudder, and sent a chill to his heart. They even accused him of causing children to be kidnapped so that he might drink their innocent blood.

All this growing disesteem hung on him like a nightmare. Howbeit he took no personal precautions. "Distrust," he used to say, "does kings more harm than good." True, he maintained a small army at the Louvre drawn from various sources, some two thousand strong, but it was a sort of caravanserai into which he who liked might enter, and Italian and Spanish and the Gascon dialect were heard there more often than French.

Malherbe gave poetic utterance to these fatalistic notions:

"Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend pas nos rois."

Despite the fact that duelling had been forbidden on pain of death, encounters took place even in the royal apartments. In the courtyard—a downright stable, its pavement fouled with dung—there were thieving and horse-play, soldiers gambling, captains twirling their moustachios and breathing mutual defiance in real heroic style. Fire-eating swashbucklers nearly knocked each other's heads off—inflicting grave wounds—which were never fatal. Every one bore himself before the King without a vestige of constraint. It was all very well for Henry to fly into a rage and shout:

"I have made a law; I mean it to be obeyed, and I will see to it that it shall be!" No one was impressed by the King's Majesty.

The Queen and the Marquise were perpetually slinging mud at each other. To make the latter's heart easy, the King had pardoned

her brother the Comte d'Auvergne, who had been deeply involved in the Biron conspiracy, and had legitimised her son, Gaston Henry. But she was not, for such paltry terms as these, going to withdraw her claim to the throne. She kept on badgering her lover with that famous promise of his, and she had a peculiarly irritating habit of publicly referring to her son as "My Dauphin."

And Henriette! What of her? For many a long day now the joys of love had turned to ashes in her mouth. But grief leaves deeper traces in its wake than happiness. What do we seek for all our life long? What is the constant aim of our endeavour? It is surely to be thrilled, painfully or pleasantly, what matters?—so only we are thrilled. To respond to such sensations is to live. Henriette procured him his thrill. She deceived him, withheld herself, gave herself, cursed him, caressed him, amused him, kept him up to the mark. She had never allowed him to entertain that most desirable illusion of fancying he was loved for himself alone. As venal as she was unprincipled, she fomented all the squabbles at the Court and pestered him for money. She had never been very close to his heart, but she was a physical necessity to him. She existed for the gratification of his senses, not for his happiness.

When her insolence went too far, he swore he would never see the impudent creature again. Then a few nights would go by; the hours would drag wearily on. Burning memories would come and assail him as he lay in the connubial bed beside his fat, insipid Queen. And desire would lay hold on him, desire stronger than ever, for the dark, lissom body of that wayward girl.

He tried to resist, to do without her. He talked about her to the unimpressible Sully, who growled out:

"Sire, that trull, that strumpet will be the death of all of us."

He unburdened himself to his confessor. But the confessor was very old, rather feeble-minded, and hard of hearing. He was always confounding the present with the past, the magic past, and never wearied of calling to mind that he had once been confessor to the ill-fated Mary Queen of Scots.

Harassed, unhappy, the King turned to the devoted La Varenne.

Alas! La Varenne, who had first been cook, then, in succession, pander-in-ordinary to His Majesty's desires, skilful secret-service agent, master of the bedchamber, Marquis of La Varenne, member of the Royal Council, Comptroller-General of the postal service, Governor of La Flèche, having at length arrived at the topmost peak of honour and good fortune, was now addressing himself to works of penance, like any old lady of the Court, and exhorted Henry to abandon his foolish, frivolous ways. "Sire," he said, "be quit of petticoats and placket-holes, and bring us back the Jesuits."

Henry fled away, and went and found his wife surrounded by her Court of buffoons and dwarfs and jesters and magicians and exotic animals.

"My chick, I am not happy. . . ."

"Monsieur, make that strumpet of a Marquise of yours give you back your promise, and recall the Jesuits. You promised when we were married you would do so."

Gravely preoccupied, he withdrew to his study and sat down, deep in thought. If he recalled the Jesuits, he need, at any rate, look for no harm from that quarter. Moreover, they were marvellous educationists, and the French aristocracy had sore need of a strict and competent upbringing. But this was a gloomy line of thought; so he took up a pen and began to give Henriette a rating. It was a pen that had been dipped in vitriol.

Springtime was robing the woods in green. Time was when he had written to Gabrielle saying:

"To spend April away from one's mistress is not to live at all."

A terrible longing took hold of him to gallop through the wind, the blood-stirring wind, all the way to Verneuil, where Henriette had gone to make a few weeks' stay. It was but thirty odd miles from Paris.

Stuffed with truffles and fish from the sea, black game, savoury dishes richly spiced, continually dipping into his comfit-box for yet another cantharides-drop flavoured with vanilla, he sat and nursed his gout and his fever.

On the 16th May 1603, the doctors were once more gathered in conclave about the ailing King. This was the verdict whereof they solemnly delivered themselves:

“Abstineat a quavis muliere, etiam regina.”

You might as well die altogether. . . .

Gone those delicious hours of dalliance which banish all our sorrows! The nightingales were singing as though their life was ebbing from them in waves of passionate song. Far and wide the still night air was filled with the chirping of crickets. Lovers sang to their guitars beneath the latticed windows of their ladies. And the King, stopping his ears and shutting his eyes, repeated the lines of his protégé, the poet Bertaut:

“Félicité passée
Qui ne peux revenir,
Tourment de ma pensée,
Que n’ai-je, en te perdant, perdu le souvenir!”

As soon as he was able to leave his room, he went to see his Dauphin in his own quarters, jumped him up and down in his arms, gave him sweetmeats, let him pull his beard, rode astride on a stick to see if he could get a laugh out of the glum, sulky little wretch, cruel and unamusable even now, his mother’s son, and no mistake!

What promise for the future did the puny creature offer? Was *he* the sort of stuff that kings are made of? What a difference between this sickly specimen and his fine love-children, the three little Vendômes! Why, no sooner had they come into the world than they deafened every one with their loud, imperious cries, and sucked their nurses dry!

Whipped, bled, purged, the little weakling of a Dauphin pulled a wry face and made but sorry progress. The sight of his brother César de Vendôme eating, in true Bourbon fashion, his garlic dipped in wine, made his gorge rise.

Corisande, the proud Corisande, had given him his first sword. What would he do with it?

His father, taking pity on him, lifted him up on his knees and, in order to get him to eat his pap, took a spoonful of it himself, saying merrily as he did so to Héroard, the child's doctor:

"If they want to know what the King of France is doing now, tell them he's eating his pap."

He had been informed that, under the pretext of forearming their son against poison, the Queen his mother was stuffing him with mysterious drugs. Everybody made use of these antidotes, even the Pope himself. Henry's good sense, however, began to take alarm. Wouldn't they kill him, his heir, his one and only heir?

"Yes! Yes! they would be the death of him. The Marquise wants him to die so that her own bastard may succeed," cried the Queen, whose interest in her child was mainly prompted by hatred of her rival.

"Love me, then, love me, my son," mumbled the King, his lips buried in the hair of his spiritless infant.

An adorable little fair-haired doll, about as tall as a pair of boots, was leaning against the table; it was Catherine Henriette de Vendôme, whose bright eyes were gazing intently at her father. They were blue, blue as periwinkles; those eyes, and the sight of them seemed to bring back the past, the sweet memories of bygone days, the peace and loving kindness of Gabrielle d'Estrées.

He seized the little one, who thrilled with delight, and pressed her eagerly, yet sadly, to his bosom.

In the course of the King's journey to Metz, La Varenne, a pattern of devotion, brought him, not a damsel, but the Jesuits of Verdun, who petitioned for their re-establishment in France. He said he would see about it: but two Jesuits obtained permission to accompany him: Père Ignatius and Père Cotton. Père Cotton never left him. He took the place, now that His Majesty was sick and restless, of women and buffoons. The King made fun of him. He took it all in good part, and advanced the fortunes of his Order.

Later on, he refused successively the Archbishopric of Arles and a cardinal's hat. He elected to remain at the King's side, where he could the more effectively promote the interests of the Jesuits.

"Father, you are as staunch and true a man as Biron was a treacherous," he often used to say.

The King always had to have someone to talk to, and Père Cotton was a first-rate listener.

His former confessor, old now and almost stone-deaf, he made Bishop of Troyes, and took Cotton in his stead. The Jesuit had an easy, pleasant way with him, and rallied the King upon his failing—Henriette. One day when he was reproaching the King with continually returning to his vomit, the latter put on his spectacles and, looking the Jesuit straight in the eyes, said:

"It's all very well to talk, *mon père*, but what would you do if they put you to bed with Mlle d'Entragues?"

"I know well enough what I ought to do, Sire," answered the wily confessor, "but I know not what I *should* do."

Sully, Père Cotton, Bassompierre or Roquelaure, took it in turns to be in attendance on the King when he was on the comode, which had now become his usual seat.

The jester with his cap-and-bells was never still.

Henry, with drawn face and hollow cheeks, took hold of Sully's hand and heaved a sigh.

"Old friend," said he, "I am feeling so bad that it looks very much as though God intends to take me. Being therefore obliged, after thinking of my own spiritual welfare, to take steps necessary to safeguard the succession of my children and to secure that they shall reign to the proper advantage of my wife, my State, my good servants and my poor people, whom I love as if they were my own dear children, I am desirous of conferring with you on all these matters before coming to a decision."

They were left alone. They had talked a long time about the affairs of the country, when Sully said:

"Monseigneur le Comte d'Auvergne, Sire, will have to be immediately shut up in the Bastille."

"What? He's conspiring again?"

"He always will; it's in his blood; Your Majesty knows that well enough. And, if I might be permitted, Sire . . ."

"Go on! Go on! You are my only friend. . . ."

"Madame de Verneuil ought to go there too."

"Why, what do you know?"

"We've no formal proofs yet, but we know they are plotting with the Spaniards, and that your life is at stake."

The King looked down on a bracelet of the Marquise's hair which he wore on his wrist, and sadly he caressed it.

"A wicked woman," he murmured, "is a dangerous animal."

Dysentery, then retention of urine, and, after that, the gout kept the King a prisoner at the Louvre.

No man was ever less made for immobility and the splendid isolation of royal invalids than Henry IV. He was constantly out hunting, or racing across country, or tearing from one château to another, giving an eye to one or other of his innumerable building schemes, or spurring between the Arsenal and the Louvre, or holding a Council in the open air, and walking the councillors with great strides about the alleys of the Tuileries. He could not endure being alone, or having nothing to do, or keeping silent. He sent for the Marquise. Ah, if she would only come quickly and take his mind off his inactivity, and interrupt this silence, which, somehow or other, he dreaded so. Let her come and amuse him with her lively sallies, her caresses and her witty gossip. The mere sight of her would ease his mind and make him feel more cheerful.

But Henriette replied that she was afraid of the Queen, that she had been threatened, and that she would not come.

The King felt unimaginably wretched.

The Queen, too, never came to see him. They had fallen out again. She had gravely offended him. Sully, the great patcher-up of quarrels, the grave and formal Sully, trotted from Henry to Marie, drew up letters of apology from the Queen to the King,

delivered them himself, and came in for the first blows in every new battle.

But Marie, even when peace was made, did not stop the longer with her husband. Often, during the hot, late summer afternoons, she ordered mattresses stuffed with choice and freshly gathered herbs to be spread out on the ground. Dressed in the flimsiest of garments, she would lie down at full length, freely displaying her bosom, her arms and even her fat, white thighs to the gaze of her foreign courtiers. Indolent as a sultana, she made Leonora wave a fan over her. Her maids-of-honour brought her bouquets of flowers, taking care to see that there were no roses among them, for the Queen hated the smell of roses and could not bear the sight of one, even in a picture.

Bellegarde was very eclectic. He divided his attentions between the Queen and the Marquise, though neither of them knew it. And now he took to sighing sweet madrigals into Marie's ear, and she listened, highly gratified. Under her veil, Leonora smiled an evil smile. This strange Italian woman, with her Jewish sorcerers, her seductive and insolent spouse, had now got Marie, whom they called in private that "balorda" (that stupid lump), completely under their thumb.

The dashing Bassompierre, a great favourite with the women, and young Gramont, Corisande's son, brought all the prettiest women at the Court to see the King. The patient's bedroom was never clear of them. The soft, bewitching sound of rustling skirts began to bring Henry back to life again.

These gushing ladies were very frank of speech. There was no ceremony at these gatherings. Etiquette went by the board. Revelations about budding love-affairs at Court, full-blooded jests or barrack-room humour kept the company in roars of laughter. Too much courtesy on the King's part would not have gone down with that scented, bold and brazen crowd.

Supper parties, ballet rehearsals, Paris street-ditties and music, music, and yet more music, till at last the palace gates were shut and only the inner ring stayed on to play cards with His Majesty.

And when the whole company had departed and only the footmen were left to light him to bed, when His Majesty had duly said his prayers at his bedside, his final thoughts were of Henriette. He wrote her thrice a day.

In his dressing-gown, with his night-cap on his head and his bed-socks on his feet, the King was walking in his gallery. His steps were hasty, unequal, erratic.

Standing flat against the wall, pressing his diamond chain to his heart, Sully, alarmed at this excessive agitation, called out beseechingly:

"Sire?"

"Ah," asked the love-lorn King for the tenth time, "what did she say to you?"

Sully closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and recited:

"She said that she begs Your Majesty to be so good as to see her sometimes, but without any familiarity, and without taking any special liberty with her person. She conjures you to ask nothing of her that would prejudice her in the eyes of the Queen, of whom, she says, she stands in dread. Your Majesty will be able to make as free as you like with her when you have made it impossible for her to be offended, or to give offence."

"It seems to me, my friend, unless I am very much mistaken, that the Marquise is suggesting that I should either make her Queen or henceforth renounce her favours."

"That, Sire, I verily believe, is the position."

"Well, she wants it and so do I, still more. But my answer to all that will startle her. She will find herself caught in her own net."

He resumed his walk, his head on his chest, his hands behind him, panting, and jerking out words half-choked with emotion:

"My friend, I'll let her see that I've got more power over myself than people think. I'll never see her again. No, never!"

When he got back to the Arsenal, Sully took his diary, and in it wrote these words:

"The King and the Marquise cannot bear one another, and cannot live apart."

Henry IV thought he would like to break it off in person. . . . His mistress contrived to persuade him that it was Sully who had been to blame all along. He hated her and distorted everything she said.

This put the King in a passion, and off he tore to the Arsenal. Sully was busy in the foundry. As soon as he saw the rage the King was in, he went and fetched a letter of Henriette's in which she confirmed everything he had said. That finished it. As the King got into his carriage he said mournfully to Sully:

"Good-bye, old friend. Stick to your furnaces, and keep a place in your heart for me, for I love you as a thoroughly upright man, in whose mouth I plainly see there is no guile."

Yet once again the King made it up with his Marquise; and the Queen went mad with rage. Said Henry to his confessor, who was giving him a jobation:

"She's put me wrong with the Queen, with my people and with God. She has deceived me times without number. And yet I can't cure myself of her."

His chronicler, Pierre Matthieu, came to read him his latest pages. He referred to the danger of the King's being led away by women.

"Why show up my weak points?" asked Henry.

"Sire," was the reply, "the lesson will be just as salutary for your son as the recital of your good ones."

"You're right. Tell the whole truth, then. If you said nothing of my faults, no one would believe the rest. Put them down, so that I may keep clear of them."

After the King had finished his devotions, the barber took off his night-cap and combed his hair with ivory combs.

He was seated on a low chair at the foot of his bed, pale and shrunken.

When they had put his hat on his head, the secretaries came in, followed by the Dukes, the Marshals, the Provincial Governors, the senior Presidents, the Lieutenant-General, and some intimate friends.

Some of them, having kissed his leg, departed again. The Councillors remained. He listened to what they had to say, like a man in a dream. For many a day now they had been dinning into his ears the treasonable conduct of the Comte d'Auvergne and the Marquise de Verneuil. They had got letters they offered to show him, letters proving that brother and sister were in the plot together up to the hilt, and conspiring to make away with him. With a shaky hand he took the letters.

He had pardoned the Count, despite the murmurs of Court and people. There were some ballads going the round, showing up the base motives of that culpable act of clemency. He knew all about it. Ever since the beginning of his love for Henriette, it had been perfidy and treason all along the line. But wasn't he the prime offender? That promise he had made, never intending to keep it—he couldn't forgive himself for that. That bit of foul practice would pursue him to the grave; he knew it would.

There were tears in his eyes as he said in a low and melancholy tone, "Leave it at that, gentlemen; I will see the matter through."

All bowed their heads in silence.

Henry IV possessed authority. He took a high, firm tone. He was not easily deceived. "We've got to deal with a King whose beard is white, a King who has seen the world." But his authority and his firm tone proved powerless where the great nobles and women were concerned.

When the Councillors had departed, attendants came and rubbed the fainting King with hot towels. When he had got back to bed he called for a map of the ocean. Champlain, the Huguenot navigator, who had served him well in Catherine's day with his triumphant cruises down the Breton coasts—Champlain was setting foot in Canada. The King was with his faithful subject in the spirit in those far-off lands. Ah, what would he not have given to

have gone along with him on that adventure, discovering new lands, beholding new climes and men of other races!

The King had come to see his mistress. She lived on a sumptuous scale. The six white horses of her coach were shod with silver. In her suite of gilded rooms, pictures, carpets and priceless furs abounded. Sparkling with gems, the Marquise was awaiting him with her customary *hauteur*. She began by launching out into vehement complaints about everything and everybody, and particularly about the unworthy position the King compelled her to occupy.

With shining eyes he breathed in her too ensnaring scent as he showered kisses on her hand.

"Leave me, Sire, leave me alone. I would fain withdraw to a Franciscan nunnery. It is high time I should think about the welfare of my soul, for I shall not live much longer."

"What, are you ill, my pet?"

"Your fat goodwife does all she can to make me so. Only to-day I threw my dinner to a dog, who ate it and straightway died in convulsions too horrible to describe."

"Come, come!" said the King impatiently. "Get rid of those notions and come and sit on my knee. Don't play the disdainful virgin. The part doesn't suit you at all."

She made a profound curtsy.

"Sire, your physicians have forbidden you to make love. I have a conscience and I should not like to burden it with your death."

"Ah, you are merry! I am quite well now, thank God. Doctors, my sweet one, are asses. It's only the gout that worries me, but the Jew's-stone and the crab's-eyes are beginning to do the trick. The worst part of the whole business is doing without you."

She looked at him with that strange, half-daring expression that never failed of its effect upon the King. He rose, with a mortified look on his face.

"You refuse yourself because you say it is your duty, and your conscience won't allow you. But the real reason is those little new

flirtations you've been having with certain people I've heard mentioned; people I don't much care about."

She looked at him fixedly with half-shut eyes, without deigning to defend herself. Exasperated by her insolence, he went on:

"Very well, then; since you wish it, let us talk seriously. I have information about all that's going on between you and your brother against me and my government."

"It's an utter lie!" she exclaimed, with a self-possession so proud and so marvellous that it even abashed the King, accustomed though he was to her exhibitions of arrogance.

"Don't lie! I've got your letters."

Full of hatred, she rushed at him, crying: "The older you get the more crabbed and suspicious you become. There's no living with you, and the kindest thing you could do to me would be never to see me alone any more."

"Very well, then; I won't."

"I curse the day when first you came to Malesherbes, and saw me there. I wish my children were dead."

Pale as death, stricken at heart, he paced about the room.

"You flatter yourself that Spain will make your son a Dauphin. . . . That would mean bringing war into my kingdom. Think of the gravity of what you are doing. Give me back the promise it was so wrong of me to let you have. You will get nothing from it, believe me."

"Give it back? Never! Never! Go and find it yourself, you heretic! You perjurer!"

The King put his signature to the decree authorising the return of the Jesuits. They were permitted to found colleges in France, but Paris was still forbidden them. Henry IV was so weak, so isolated, so hungry for affection, that he said to Père Cotton, the spokesman of the Order, "Love me, for I love you."

And he promised them his heart, during his life and after his death.

Henriette had Mass celebrated every day now in her private

chapel and appeared at the Louvre no more. She urgently demanded permission to select a safe domicile for herself and her children, for she feared for their lives. She was for ever bringing charges against the Queen.

Henry IV had given up replying to her. At length she realised that their love-making days were over; the tigress humbled herself and began to purr. Then Henry resumed the pen:

"If what you did, bore any relation to what you said, I should not be as displeased with you as I am. Your letters are eloquent of affection, your actions towards me only betoken ingratitude. It is five years and more that you have been going on like this, and every one remarks on it. And if others think like that, imagine what I, who am most concerned, must feel like. It is to your advantage that people should think I love you, but it is certainly not to mine that people should see how much I suffer because you do not love *me*. That's why you write to me, and why I pay you back with silence. If you care to treat me as you ought, I shall be more than ever yours. If you don't, then keep this letter, for it will be the last you will ever receive from me, who kiss your hands a million times."

The ink on that letter was scarcely dry when a man called Morgan, who played the part of intermediary between the d'Entragues and the King of Spain, was placed under arrest.

In the light of his confessions there was nothing for it but to issue a warrant for the arrest of the Comte d'Auvergne and the Comte d'Entragues. The Marquise on being interrogated declared that she did not think she was acting amiss, and that all she wanted was to safeguard the future of her children and herself. She knew (she went on) that the Queen, if ever she had the power, would destroy them. The only way to get rid herself of the nightmare was to settle down somewhere outside France.

The Comte d'Auvergne was coward enough to accuse his sister. Did not all these activities aim at putting Gaston Henri de Verneuil-Bourbon on the throne of France when Henry IV should come to die?

The King, out of utter weariness, forgave her, to the scandal of his people. He did, however, stipulate for the return of his promise, which had been at the bottom of all the subsequent troubles.

The Comte d'Entragues, Henriette's father, brought it in a crystal casket, together with a sacred relic. The Chancellor, the Attorney-General, a Counsellor of State, and several great lords, signed the receipt.

Against its surrender, the Marquise demanded an income of a hundred thousand crowns and a marshalcy for her father. Sully advanced her twenty thousand, and inwardly swore she should not have another sou.

Auvergne took to the woods, where he lived like an outlaw. Another intercepted message threw a light on the full extent of the plot. The whole of the South was to rise in revolt. The fugitive was dragged from his retreat and flung into the Bastille. He gave away the whole business, and the Comte d'Entragues came to keep him company, while the Marquise, who was lodged in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, gave hospitality to the guardsmen and archers of the watch. Never was seen a defendant so proudly insolent. The King took her children away from her and had them taken to Saint-Germain to be brought up there with the three Vendômes and the two legitimate children.

Finally, the Comte d'Auvergne and the Comte d'Entragues were condemned to death, and the Marquise received orders to retire, for the remainder of her life, to the Convent of Beaumont-les-Tours. The Queen was in the seventh heaven. She gave up putting aphrodisiacs in the King's drink, and a look of something like tenderness came into her bovine eyes.

It was not for long. . . .

Henry IV sent the Comte d'Entragues back to his château at Malesherbes, whilst the sentence of death passed on the Comte d'Auvergne was commuted to imprisonment for life. As for the Marquise, she was merely interned at Verneuil, where she immediately set about gathering a Court around her.

LA NYMPHE AU PETIT MUSEAU

IN a bower of roses in the gardens at Fontainebleau, the King, young again, and debonair, hummed this song at the feet of a delicious young damsel, fair-tressed and warm-blooded as Ceres:

“Viens, Aurore,
Je t’implore,
Je suis gai quand je te vois.
La bergère
Qui m’est chère
Est vermeille comme toi.

De rosée
Arrosée,
La rose a moins de fraîcheur.
Une hermine
Est moins fine,
Le lait a moins de blancheur.

D’ambrosie,
Bien choisie
Hébé la nourrit à part.
Et sa bouche
Quand j’y touche
Me parfume de nectar.”

September was reddening the woods that echoed with the sound of stags calling for their mates. Henry had got back his health again, and his spirits. The merry face, the laughing eyes, the hearty laugh, the old *brio*—all had come again. The Faun was awake once more.

The latest on the list was not a stereotyped beauty. In a Court

where every one had a nickname she was known as "the Nymph with the tiny snout," or "little Miss Littlenose." She was fifteen; the lusty swain was two-and-fifty. The pretty dimpled body and the charming graces of the dainty child were appetising. Her arch yet artless mind delighted the King, who was sick to death of crooked ways.

Belonging to a noble but impoverished family, Jacqueline de Bueil had been brought up by the Princess de Condé, who could never deny anything to Henry of Navarre. The Princess had formerly been accused of poisoning her husband and was on the point of being put to death when she appealed to Henry, who, setting himself up as her protector, saved her life and, though aware of his irregular lineage, saw to her son's education and nominated him as his heir in case he should die without legitimate male issue.

The Princess parted with Mlle de Bueil for a consideration of thirty thousand pounds, and, further, demanded that she should be married, for appearance' sake, to some person of quality.

At grey dawn, on the 5th October, the King's new mistress was married at Saint Mans des Fosses, to young Césy de Champvallon, nephew of Queen Marguerite's quondam lover.

This young gentleman, as poor in spirit as in purse, a devotee of the card-table and the lute, was destined to be her husband in name alone. By order of the King, the members of his suite never left the newly married couple. All night long they stationed themselves around the bed with torches. And there they stood and watched—a keen and singular vigil—over the golden-haired treasure of their royal master.

When morning came, Henry IV arrived to take Champvallon's place in the nuptial, yet virgin, couch. The company withdrew. The two lovers stayed on in bed till two in the afternoon. The husband was fast asleep in a room overhead.

Some days later, Mlle de Bueil, now Mme de Champvallon, was created Comtesse de Maret, with all the prerogatives and revenues thereunto pertaining. The King furthermore bestowed on his dazzling inamorata a house in Paris, dresses and jewels, and

then, for a New Year's gift, nine thousand *livres*, which Sully doled out, grumbling as usual.

The Queen was not too terribly upset about this rather trivial affair.

However, the Evergreen Lover, as if to make up for his enforced abstinence, wallowed in the sensual sty. There was a Mlle des Essarts, a magnificent creature of twenty-five, who now took his fancy. She was like a statue and preserved her marvellous beauty by rubbing herself all over with some mysterious pomade. But he quickly wearied of this lascivious baggage for whom, incidentally, he had also had to pay thirty thousand crowns.

Jacqueline de Bueil was charming, her alluring innocence enchanting. Yet the King was bored with her. His third mistress was a fine-looking girl, a red-haired buxom beauty nicknamed "the Lioness," who sang so marvellously that the nightingales died of very jealousy. But her tuneful numbers did not hold him long. The King's tit-bits now became too numerous to count.

"What can't be cured, must be endured—and deplored in silence," said Sully, with a look of resignation on his face. The Florentine Ambassador exclaimed bluntly, "The fact is, this place isn't a Court, it's a b——"

Doctors and confessor volleyed and thundered. It was no good. Nothing would hold him. He took to love, as some men take to drink—in order to drown his troubles. But what beauty stood a chance against the charms of the Marquise de Verneuil? What were youth and freshness and brilliance and sweetness—what was anything compared with the snake-like seductiveness of the pitiless, the fatal, Henriette—"for ever warm and still to be enjoyed"?

Away in her prison lashed by the blasts of winter, the lonely captive, her head filled with dark thoughts of vengeance, looked forth and watched the messengers of the King, her slave, draw near.

"Love me, my darling, for I swear that all else in the world is dross to me compared with you, you whom I kiss and kiss again, a million million times."

THE REAPPEARANCE OF MARGOT

HENRY IV had been at peace with his former spouse ever since she had consented to the divorce. He paid her debts, wrote letters to her in which he called her "sister," while she, on her side, replied with elegant epistles, most delicate and politic.

"Monseigneur," she said in one of them, "Your Majesty, after the fashion of the gods, is not content with heaping good things and favours on his creatures, but even deigns to watch over them and console them in their afflictions."

She referred to herself so humbly as "all that was left of an unhappy wreck," that the King took compassion on her and suffered her to come forth from the impregnable retreat in which she had been living for so many years. She received permission to approach Paris, though not, as yet, to enter it. And he confirmed her right to use the name of queen.

She began her journey in June 1605, in her antique litter adorned with her emblems of love. She was accompanied by her latest conquest, a young carpenter of Arles whom she had made Seigneur de St-Julien. For she retained her confidence in the sons of the soil.

"A good gentleman," she used to say, "is well to look upon at Court, or at the wars, but not in bed. A fine, strapping farm-lad is better than a handsome, brave, o'erwearyed knight."

Henry, however, had got a rod in pickle for the woman who had once been his most terrible domestic bugbear. He passed the sponge over all her delinquencies, all her sins and perfidies, yet he could not abstain from staging a little comedy effect which he knew was bound to hurt her.

To welcome her in his name, he sent Champvallon, with whom she had been so deeply in love in days gone by. He was still a fine

figure of a man, not quite so suave, but more martial than of old, and a few lines that had made their appearance in his face gave him an interesting look.

Margot was nearing her fifty-third year, but she had lived at such a pace that she looked twice her age. When, at a sudden turn in the road, Champvallan, reining in his prancing steed, came to a halt before her, she had no time to replace her mask and cover up her blowsy features, which she had so plastered with cosmetics that she had had more than one attack of erysipelas.

The handsome cavalier was amazed when his eyes lighted on this fat, perspiring woman who had painfully compressed herself into a sort of ermine corslet which displayed her two enormous breasts smothered all over with powder. Pulling himself together, he put his lips to the hem of her hooped skirt, while she extended for him to kiss a hand encased in a glove of painted leather.

Boldness is not becoming in fat and faded ladies, nor are tears. The old coquette made skilful play with her fan, a miracle of design, wrought of mother-of-pearl enriched with gems. Then she resumed her mask and off they started again.

A little farther along, she saw the pretty little Vendôme child hurrying towards her, the child who, but for her shilly-shallying over the divorce, would have been the Dauphin. Gabrielle's son was now eleven. She loudly proclaimed her admiration, and, on reaching the first stage, dispatched a letter to the happy father congratulating him on possessing such a marvel.

Feeling very proud, the little boy cantered along beside Marguerite's litter till they reached the outskirts of Paris. Couriers met them *en route* bearing orders from the King that the ex-Queen was to be lodged in the Château de Madrid. There, they sent her the Dauphin Louis, a child of five. She raved about him. "Ah, what a lovely child! How sturdy too!" Henry soon followed his son. He was all agog at the prospect of seeing her again. As he spurred along, all the daring exploits of old days, all the ferocity of the civil wars came back to his mind. They had been young together, and together they had been through times of violence, passion and

tragic sorrow. Ah, that vanished world, with its strange and bitter savour!

In sexual matters they were both of a piece. Each of them had a harem. And now they were well calculated to understand each other.

She awaited his arrival mounted on stilted shoes a foot in height, wearing a dress as big and round as a castle-keep. With one hand she leaned on the shoulder of a strapping fellow, who served her day and night; with the other she fanned her great moon-face, her garish wig, her bulgy bosom. She was a sorry sight.

The King bowed low, sweeping the ground with his plumed hat. So this was what had become of the exquisite little serpent of days gone by! He did not smile. He had thought to find his youth again, all fresh, alert, intact, and now . . .

He did not stay long at the château. Accompanied by his friends, who had been looking on at the adventure with a smile, he went back to the Louvre.

All that summer, the shady recesses of the Bois de Boulogne gave shelter to pagan fêtes and shameless orgies. But when winter came, Marguerite begged leave to make her home in Paris. The King was not afraid of her now. The fat old mischief-maker could do no harm. He gave her the leave she asked for, and the ex-Queen went into residence at the Hôtel de Sens.

There was an official reception at the Louvre. She had left behind her a poor little hunted and harried King of Navarre, out at elbows, down at heel, and she had laughed him to scorn. He now meant her to see him in all his glory as King of France. Arrayed in magnificent attire, his stature added to by a lofty hat adorned with diamonds and aigrettes, he went down to assist her from her coach.

With a very glum look, Marie de' Medici had to wait at the foot of the great staircase and perform, amid a mocking crowd, the profoundest of obeisances, such as are offered only to the mightiest of queens.

Thenceforth Marguerite was at all the fêtes. In the eyes of the populace, this great lump of a woman, with breasts like a milch-

cow, was still "Margot," their little madcap Queen, the last of the Valois, a relic, despicable and despised may be, but still a relic. People laughed openly at her tow wigs, her powder and paint, and her tribe of down-at-heel, star-gazing poets.

And then a sad event suddenly plunged her into mourning. Her prestige as queen, and as daughter, wife and sister of queens, the romance of her love-affairs, all the blood poured out so prodigally about her voluminous carmine-coloured crinoline fringed with sachets containing the embalmed hearts of those who had died for love of her—all these things set up a dangerous ferment in young and romantic heads.

A young, eighteen-year-old page caught fire and went off his head on her account. One morning, as Queen Margot was coming back from Mass in company with Saint-Julien, the lover whom she so adored, the page, who had concealed himself at the corner of an alley, fired on the favourite and killed him. Then, leaping on a horse, he galloped away. Marguerite, bathed once more in a lover's blood, howled with rage and despair.

They brought her back the murderer. She flung herself on him like a fury and tried to strangle him with her own hands. With his face all scored by the nails of the woman he loved, the young page gave a kick to the body lying on the ground before him and made sure it was dead.

"You can kill me now," he said. "I regret nothing."

This lad, whom she had known from his birth, whose education had been all her care, she now obtained leave to have beheaded at dawn outside her window. And while she looked down upon the tragic scene, her secretary, the poet Maynard, composed a touching elegy on Saint-Julien's taking-off.

But these two deaths haunted her. She quitted the Hôtel de Sens.

The King gave her leave to build a house on the Pré-aux-Clercs. There she had gardens laid out, reaching down to the Seine. She liked to watch the scholars disporting themselves at their games, and gazed through her glass with melting eyes at the sturdy forms

of the boatmen pulling their craft upstream. She founded, amid the greenery, a convent of Petits Augustins, where every day, almost every hour, she went to make her devotions. It was there she buried Saint-Julien, whose epitaph in verse was her own composition.

Meantime, she had engaged the services of a new lover, a young Gascon, as fair as Apollo to look upon, but in mind the completest dunderhead imaginable. She used to beat him, much to Henry's amusement, but he died in no long time, exhausted by the arduous of his elderly mistress.

Her next capture was a musician named Villars, whom the people nicknamed "King Margot."

Incense and love got on well together. This combination of piety and lewdness called forth some epigrams from the dour d'Aubigné. Here is one of them:

"Toi qui t'es pu soûler d'hommes,
Te penses-tu crever de dieux?"

She gathered a Court about her, vain and vapid poets, none too clean in their person—"my bedesmen," she used to call them—and ladies fair and frail.

Often the King, cut off from witty society now that he never saw his Marquise, would leave the Queen to her own devices. She was still as stupid, still as much of a nagger as ever, always being upset by some stray piece of gossip or other. Moreover, she was tremendously taken up with her knightly entourage and her Concini, who was becoming ever more and more important. At such times he would rush off to fat Margot of the witty tongue, hoping to get a little amusement out of her.

He would stay awhile to hear the lute well touched, and artful voice warble some sonnet *à la* Petrarch, with Greek dragged in here, there and everywhere. It all reminded him of the Court of Henry III—Henry III with his mignons, his sparkling wits and beaux, so gallant, so cruel, so trivial and so quintessentialised. How

they talked and talked of things ethereal, yet could not keep their hands from wandering!

And then with some rough campaigner's jest, Henry would prick the bubble of this hypocrisy. Whereat the whole company would let themselves go, and then it was a case of seeing who would tell the bawdiest story.

When they were ring-tilting at the Arsenal, it was sometimes Marguerite who gave the ring, and then the King took a special delight in seeing how often he could thrust his sword into it.

When she was fifty-eight, Margot took Vincent de Paul for her chaplain. Even then she was composing "*Le Ruelle mal assortie*," in which she said, speaking of love, "There's nought so sweet, if it were not so brief."

The wicked old woman was as happy as the day was long.

THE OLD COMPANIONS

A GAIN there was unrest among the Protestants. Their leader, Turenne, whom the King had created Duke of Bouillon and Prince of Sedan, said he could produce a treaty signed by the Duke of Savoy, the King of Spain, the Pope and Henry IV, foreshadowing a second and final Saint-Bartholomew.

In many a castle perched high among the mountains, where knights and ladies had loved and languished, and troubadours had played and sung their gentle lays, field-preachers were setting men's minds on fire against the King, and the chanting of psalms—set, it is true, to ballads and to virelais—made doleful music there.

There was going the round a saying of the brave La Noue, who had fallen beneath the banners of Navarre. "Three things," he said, "sap the might of empires: impiety, injustice and the decay of morals."

And were not all three united in Henry IV? When he abjured, he declared, with that touching, irresistible smile of his, to the companions who had served him in the old and difficult days, stern uncompromising Huguenots, "I'm getting cursed for all of you. Let the chastisement fall on me alone."

But the sequel had shown that he had only said that to gull them, to keep them attached to his triumphal car. Who had brought back the Jesuits? Who had chosen a Jesuit for his confessor, that is to say, to be the repository of all his secrets? And who was it to-day took part in theatrical religious processions, bare-headed, holding a taper, behind the canopy of the Blessed Sacrament? Who kissed holy images and bowed the knee to priests? Who, at Eastertide, touched those afflicted with the King's Evil and cured them, for the ways of God are unfathomable? Who, to ward off some public calamity, ordered the shrine of Sainte-Geneviève to be

carried in procession? Why, the one-time heretical and excommunicated Henry of Navarre, whom they had put upon the Throne of France.

They accused him of forgetting, with equal facility, the good and the ill that had been wrought him, and they did not forgive him the favours he had granted to former members of the League. In him they would only see their whilom tent-companion, "King Tuppenny." They did not understand that, in order to rule, he had to put off the rough, familiar manners of those old days. They had befriended him and stood by him when times were bad, in the old heroic days. They could not use themselves to the luxury of the piping times of peace. Many of them came to Court trailing their muddy boots about the costly floors, making the stately halls ring with their braggart shouts, threatening to cleave every one to the midriff. Shameless beggars, ill-mannered oafs, they kept their hats on in the presence, hardly even bowed, still less kissed the boot of their royal master. They rated him as if he were a school-boy, and taught him his own business. The obscurest little squi-reen, his hat well down over his eyes, would insolently demand his share of the cake.

The King, who bought over the greater barons, who, in fact, bought as much as he possibly could, or at least as much as Sully would let him, and who was afraid of the incorruptibles, was driven beyond endurance by the outrageous behaviour of these men. He ordered them sharply back to their estates. And they went, proud and indignant, with bitterness in their hearts, for they had seen that Henry's friends, his boon companions, in the hunting-field, at cards and even in his love-affairs, were Catholics and erstwhile members of the League. The Papists had the best offices at Court; on them the King bestowed his honours and his friendship. The tumble-down manors of Gascony, Provence and Limousin harboured many an angry heart.

But the return of the Jesuits put the coping-stone on their fury. It was all very well for the aged and intractable d'Aubigné to quote what the King had said, to tell them that he had been in fear of his

life when he signed the decree for their return. They didn't believe a word of it; they would not allow that their brave and ragged old leader had grown such a coward as to tremble when he saw a monk's habit.

By the month of September 1605, the eternal political pilgrim had again crossed the Loire, and was back in the country that he loved so well. Once more the white banner floated out on the breeze along the highways of Limoges; and the trumpets sounded "to boot and saddle" in a soldiers' camp.

The King recognised each footpath, each copse. Rivulets, mountains, vineyards, heaths and pastures made up one of those landscapes that turn life into a song. Once again he tasted the sweets of the peace that comes of pure sunlight shining on green fields. It was not the rude winds of the country beyond the Loire that stirred the pennants and the full heart of the King, but the softest, the kindest of zephyrs.

From every side came crowding memories of the adventurous days of his youth, of the old, stormy, harassed and victorious existence. Ah, how full of savour life was then, when you rubbed shoulders with death at every moment, at every turn! Those were brave days! Ah, 'Sblood, to drink life to the lees; that was the thing! In those days his future was before him, and he rode forth, with hope seated on the pillion, to greet it. But now the end, the goal had been attained. Is there anything more sad!

He now had kitchens filled to the last inch with meats of every kind. A single meal—such as they served to him alone—would suffice to feed a village. But what was the good? His teeth were gone; his stomach was ruined, his intestines all disordered.

"Roquelaure," said he to his trusty old friend, the master of his wardrobe, "how comes it that when I was King of Navarre, I had an excellent appetite and nothing to eat, and that now I am King of France, I can't find anything that tempts me?"

Roquelaure, realising that the cue was to laugh and be merry when the King gave way to his melancholy, replied:

"*Pocah de bious*, Sire, you were excommunicate in those days, and the excommunicate eat like the devil!"

And in that region, where shepherdesses and spinning maids were by no means unaccommodating, he must needs forgo the joys of rustic dalliance. His heart was young, his desires as ardent as ever they had been, but the doctors had enjoined him to be prudent; moreover, he had been so widely reproached on the score of immorality that he had to be careful lest he offended these strait-laced Huguenots. Such delights as were offered by these buxom country wenches in their sabots, he had to leave to his suite.

By way of consoling himself, he wrote to the Queen, who was *enceinte*. Absence made their hearts grow fonder.

"I cannot sleep till I have written you; but if I had you in my arms I should cherish you with all my heart. And now, good night and a thousand kisses, darling."

But Marie had one of her jealous fits, and bitterly upbraided him in her letters.

"I see that, as usual, there are liars in Paris," he replied, "people who start the rumour that we don't get on together, who perhaps don't want us to get on. But we'll show them their mistake. I note also what you say about the thin, sallow lady. That sort of merchandise is no good for my shop any more. The stock I want is white and fat. Be assured that I love you with all my heart; and you must love me too."

Seeing that the King meant business, Turenne fled to Germany, and made his submission from a safe distance. As with all the greater lords, the sole object of his activities and conspiracies was to get the freehold of the district he controlled. He wanted to be King of his castle, to go back to the old feudal times, to split France up into a number of separate units. Henry IV took a longer view. He wanted the whole of France to be one coherent whole, obedient to a single central authority.

The greater barons allowed themselves to be bought as the royal troops came nearer and nearer, and for no very great sums; sometimes for a paltry six hundred crowns. But the smaller gentry, who were more sincere and more tenacious, refused to yield. Would he have to start the old fratricidal struggle over again? Would brother have to war with brother? So the King asked himself, sad and sick at heart.

Nevertheless, these petty lordlings were wretchedly poor. The wars of religion had impoverished or ruined them. If the Dukes and Governors retained the right to administer justice in all its stages, they, with their lands all mortgaged, no longer wielded any authority, and the villeins laughed in their faces when they presumed to exact any of their manorial rights. Against the glorious background of the red autumnal sunsets the ruined battlements of their castles stood out in sharp relief, and round their towers the last of the departing swallows wheeled their flight. In each of these grim strongholds dwelt someone who of old had been of his religion, some eagle-nosed old comrade, riddled with musket wounds gained in his service, a brother-in-arms who, with tattered hose and an empty belly, had affronted with him all the perils of the civil war.

He was hail fellow well met with them all, and they returned the compliment. He knew them by their Christian names, or nicknames. He knew their strong points; he knew their failings too. Sometimes, in moments half-sad, half-sweet, when the past swept up before him like a tide, he would write to some of them with his own hand and with all the easy familiarity of bygone days:

“Crillon, old man, have you forgotten your master? I have not forgotten you. I love you better than you do me, it seems. Let these lines assure you that my friendship still endures. For a long time now, people have been saying you are coming, but I shan't believe it till I sec you. Adieu, Crillon, old friend.”

And then again, as in the old days, he would write off in this vein:

"You old rascal, I shall be with you to-morrow. A good fire, good wine, good cheer!

"Always yours,

"HENRY."

Or yet again, in the old style:

"Lend wings to your swiftest beast. Hasten, run, rush, fly. 'Tis your master's orders and your old friend's prayer."

But no one was touched by this any longer.

In those manor houses, full of unmarketable booty still black with dried blood, these proud but uncouth country squires—they had been lords or ever God was God—lived on the milk of their famished goats, the eggs of their poultry and whatever game they could bring down in their chestnut woods, buckling their doublets tight about them to drown the rumblings of an empty belly, or to hide the lack of a shirt. If they wore boots it was because they had no stockings.

But down in their cavernous stables they still kept a lean nag or so, and their arms of burnished steel were taken out and polished every day. At any moment they were ready to go forth and fight. So needy were they that if anyone had shouted, "Fine fresh herring!" or "Lovely cream cheeses!" they would have turned out to a man.

The Duke of Tonnerre, who had not been allowed to enter the Louvre in a coach, that being against the Court regulations, had a very little gate put to his castle in Burgundy, saying:

"If the King won't let me drive in when I go to see him, he shan't drive in when he comes to see me."

The folk in the north and east, whose fortunes at Court were prospering, made fun of these doughty knights:

De grands foudres de guerres
Qui semblent des tonnerres
Dedans leur bataillon
Composé de cinq hommes
Et de quatre tambours. . . .

But the King thought wonders of them. He understood them. They were eating their hearts out because they had nothing to do. It was inaction that was answerable for half the follies he committed with women.

And all along the roads, in the white dust and golden light of the late summer, fragrant as petal dust, the King, with a sprig of mint between his teeth, went pondering deeply on his great design.

To occupy his knights, the flower of his chivalry, he would lead them to battles in far-off lands, he would found the United States of Europe. Then no more of these secret underground conspiracies as cruel as they were hateful. No more wars, no more poverty, no more famine, no more persecutions! At last, Right should triumph over Might. To settle all disputes, a senate of the Christian Republic should be appointed, a Council of Sixty, four from each State, and it would be housed in a city in Central Europe; such as Metz, Geneva or Cologne.

At night, with feverish ardour, the King flung down on paper his plans for a League of Nations. When *réveillé* sounded on the fields empearled with morning dew, the King was still deep in thought.

The more cautious members of his escort advised him to keep a good five hundred paces away from all proud castle towers, out of range of treacherous shots. But Henry knew well enough that his real enemies were elsewhere. Pushing open the heavy, nail-studded doors surmounted by escutcheons carved in stone, he entered without the smallest ceremony. He embraced his old friends again, asked them for something to eat and drink, explained his difficulties, and, sitting by a fire of blazing furze, recalled, with tears in his eyes, old memories which yet were green.

So he won them back, first this one, then another. These words of the poet Malherbe were quoted as if they had been the Gospel:

Mais ce roi, des bons rois l'éternel exemplaire,
Qui de notre salut est l'ange tutélaire,

L'infaillible refuge et l'assuré secours,
Son extrême douceur ayant dompté l'envie,
De quels jours assez longs peut-il borner sa vie,
Que notre affection ne les trouve trop courts?

Ere long, a wind of Love, going on before him, filled the sails of the vessels at La Rochelle, whither he was now departing.

"If our gates be not wide enough to admit you," said the people of La Rochelle, "we will cast down three hundred fathoms of our walls."

"Do you hear them?" said the King, deeply moved. "Ah, how that gladdens my heart!"

He embraced them, weeping with joy. He loved so much to be loved!

A wintry blast, foretelling snow, brought him back to Fontainebleau, in February, for the birth of a daughter.

"I'll be your midwife, don't be afraid." This had been his promise to the Queen.

But in March, no later, he had to put foot in stirrup again, feverish and ill, yet with indomitable energy, to hie him, in three days, to Sedan, which had risen in revolt, there to extend his pardon to a contrite and penitent Turenne.

PART IV

A LAST ADVENTURE

ON all fours on the carpet, a bridle round his neck, the King of France was playing horses round and round his room. On his back was the Dauphin Louis, plying whip and spur; next to him, brandishing a sword heavier than herself, trotted the delightful little Princess Elisabeth; behind the horse, hanging on to the tiny cavalier, Chrétienne was joining in the fun, and the baby, Nicolas d'Orléans, was hiding his chubby face in his mother's satin kirtle, while she sat placidly surveying the scene.

What with the shouting and the laughter, the cracking of the whip and neighing of the horse, no one heard the Spanish Ambassador announced. That illustrious personage came forward looking a little sheepish, a little taken aback.

Without getting up, Henry looked at him and said, with a merry twinkle in his eye:

"Have you any children of your own, Monsieur?"

"I have that good fortune, Sire."

"In that case I'll finish my round of the room."

The royal nursery became a flourishing place. There was no doubt the King was getting back his youthful vigour. After Chrétienne, the future Duchess of Savoy, who was born on the 10th February 1606, there came, in quick succession, in April 1607, Antoine de Bourbon, Comte de Maret, son of Jacqueline, and Nicolas d'Orléans, second son of the Queen.

Then followed Jeanne-Baptiste de Bourbon, daughter of Mme des Essarts, born in March 1608, while Jean Gaston d'Anjou, Marie's third son, saw the light on the 25th April of the same year.

It was a squalling, brawling troop of twelve children, the offspring of five different women, that now accompanied Henry as he went from one château to another. He doted on them.

The comical ways of the Marquise's daughter, who had inherited all the spirit and vivacity of her parents, filled him with delight. But the Dauphin was a sulky child, and the morals of the little Vendôme, which were those of an Italian page, grieved him sorely. His sons had not inherited their father's manly qualities.

All these successive "happy events" did not prevent him from communicating with Henriette, who, of course, had come back into favour. After all, which is better—a faithful but disappointing wife, or a she-devil that makes you swoon with delight?

"My darling, I have been taking medicine in order to be thoroughly well able to execute all your behests, that being my crowning felicity. The weather is fine here, but I am so terribly bored wherever you are not, that I cannot endure it. Think of some means whereby I may see you in private, so that, before the leaves fall, I may show you the nether side of them."

Henriette, who nicknamed herself "The King's Wild Beast," was putting on flesh, but her smile was still as tempting and her wit as keen as ever.

"My son, kiss the King's hands most humbly for me and tell him that, if you were to be made, he would never have done it with me."

Thus she wrote to Gaston Henry on the eve of his eighth year.

The Vert-Galant was still flitting from flower to flower. Mme Quelin held him for a brief space, eclipsing the Countesses de Moret and des Essarts.

Meanwhile the royal *ménage* was going on more tranquilly. Lying at their ease in the connubial couch, Henry and Marie received their more intimate friends. In it they spent several hours of the day. True, they both had books to read, and both had spectacles astride their noses. Marie read Plutarch to please the King, and the King revelled in *Amadis of Gaul*, or Olivier de Serres' *Theatre of Agriculture*.

The Queen got up some magnificent ballets. Concini helped



British Museum

HENRY IV AND HIS FAMILY

her choose the costumes. Henry IV, the wary old fox, kept an eye on his wife's pet pander. One day he said, in a strangely grave tone, "If I was dead, that man would ruin my kingdom."

Dead! And how was it he was not dead? Since the year 1600, when a woman had been hanged for attempting to poison him, he had had six narrow escapes from assassination. The last attempt had nearly succeeded. Dragged backwards on his saddle, the King saw the murderer's dagger gleaming above his breast. In 1608, certain sorcerers directed concerted denunciations against him. These demonstrations coincided with a violent recrudescence of the King's feverish attacks, with the result that several practitioners of the black art were hanged. It would have been better if the gallows had been erected in the courtyard of the Louvre, and an example made of some of those in high places, who never ceased their machinations.

Once more quarrels broke out at the palace. The Queen wished to marry the little Dauphin to the infant daughter of the Spanish King, and little Princess Elisabeth to the new-born Spanish Crown Prince. Henry IV prevaricated. He hated Spain too thoroughly to agree to her sovereignty over France. However, the time would come when he would have definitely to negative the proposition, and that would mean open war instead of the veiled hostilities which the Spaniard had been, and still was, carrying on in France.

Keeping to himself in his Arsenal, Sully pressed on with the manufacture of artillery, and continued to add to his hoard of money; what time the King, following the chase, nosing about the country or quaffing red wine in country inns and clipping the wenches that served it, was maturing his mighty project. On his return he closeted himself with Sully to discuss and perfect it. What a marvellous world it would be! All the nations of Europe united at last after so many wars and hardships. Peace without end. . . . The Golden Age. The foreigner, filled with awe and respect, would listen promptly enough to Henry the Great, who would be under no necessity to use his big guns to induce him to

follow the path of wisdom. And Spain, arch-enemy of the human race, would be tamed—at last!

Marie de' Medici would not allow Mme de Moret to take part in the Ballet of the Nymphs which she gave in 1609. The King insisted and flew into a passion. In the end the Queen had her way. But the injured swain swore he would not go to the performance.

One day, when a rehearsal was going on, the King chanced to pass along and, the door happening to be open, caught a glimpse of Charlotte de Montmorency. He had known her from birth; had seen her grow in stature and beauty. She was now fourteen years of age, and was companion to his eldest daughter, Mlle de Vendôme. The latter, the child of his beloved Gabrielle, he proposed to marry to Mlle de Montmorency's brother, that young lady herself being affianced to the handsome Bassompierre, the Don Juan of the Court and the father of innumerable bastards.

Charlotte was so fresh and rosy, so marvellously fair; she poised her dart so gracefully and pretended so archly to pierce the King's heart with it, that he was hit in real earnest, and felt as if he were going to faint.

Thenceforward, everything and everyone else was blotted out. Charlotte reigned supreme. Nothing else mattered. Henriette, the "Wild Beast," existed for him no more. The Great Project faded away into the blue. Our elderly Romeo dyed his beard, wore scented collars and boots of perfumed leather. He danced, and sighed at the moon in gardens caressed by April's tender zephyrs. He knew now why he had lived, this old hero of so many conflicts. It was to love this little fair-haired maiden, fresh and fragrant as a morning rose.

She was his tender care, his star of good tidings, the adventurous barque and the quiet haven, his heaven and his hell combined.

What dreams were his! In the expectation of a kiss, he sucked sweet-scented pastilles. The artless smile of the little princess sent him into the seventh heaven; he was as excited as a boy. He went red and white, hot and cold, by turns, when she was by.

Virgin eyes, those big, clear, enigmatic, passionless eyes, had always charmed him.

And love—what is it? A means of excitement. He knew well enough, unrepentant lover that he was, that the greatest, nay, the only bliss is that, namely, to feel the delicious pangs of dawning love, as often as one could. Ah, the wild intoxication of a new-born passion!

Unhappily, an attack of gout supervened upon this nascent love-affair, and the King was unable to stand, as he had been doing, at a turn in the corridor to watch his wonder pass, and crave the largess of a smile. Tied reluctantly to his bed, he bade them read him *l'Astrée*, then just newly published. And in Celadon, the love-lorn swain, he recognised himself, and, above all, he recognised Astrée-Charlotte . . . and imagined her reading the Laws of Love inscribed by Celadon, her swain, in the little Temple of the Woods:

“The lover should love to excess, and love but one sole person. He should have no other passion but his love; no ambition but to please the beloved. He should love without thought of self and defend his beloved in all things. In her he should find all perfection, nor have any will but hers. He should live in her alone, look for no honour save that of loving her, and vow to love her always.”

The King glanced up at the reader. It was Antoine de Gramont, Corisande's son. The purple heathlands of the Pyrenees and the great red keep of Pau stole back into his memory.

How like his mother the young man was! Corisande, who helped him and loved him so! The friend of his old adventurous days, who gave herself to him so utterly, body and soul. What exquisite warmth and tenderness he had enjoyed in her! Ah, that mutual trust! But that, all that, was a thing of yesterday; and yesterday it was that he, the thankless one, had tasted love, on a couch of conquered banners, with that woman of the soaring soul. . . .

“How old is your mother, Gramont?”

“Fifty-seven, Sire.”

The same age as himself. . . . Ah, is there aught so tragic as that a man in the winter of his days, and all too conscious of his weight of years, should fall in love with Spring? That were to burn on earth with all the fires of hell.

"Bassompierre," said the King in a low voice to Don Juan, who was kneeling on a velvet cushion at the royal bedside, "I want to speak to you as a friend. I find that I am not merely fond of Mlle de Montmorency, I am desperately in love with her. If you marry her and she loves you, I shall hate you; if she loves me, you would hate *me*. Now, we don't want such a thing as that to spoil our friendship, for I am fond of you in every way. I have therefore decided to marry Charlotte to my nephew the Prince of Condé and to keep her about my wife. She will thus be a solace and diversion to me in the evening of my days, a time which is now at hand. I will give my nephew, who is young and cares more for hunting than for ladies, a hundred thousand francs a year to amuse himself withal. Of her I shall ask no other favour than her affection; I seek no more than that.

Bassompierre's face was a study. Charlotte! His Charlotte!

Si le roi m'avait donné
Paris sa grand-ville.
Et qu'il voulût m'enlever
L'amour de ma mie,
Je dirais au roi Henri:
Reprenez votre Paris,
J'aime mieux ma mie, O gay,
J'aime mieux ma mie.

Ah well! That sort of thing is all very fine in a ballad. But when it comes to real life you don't go and get yourself into trouble with the King about a girl, however pretty and graceful she may be.

Bassompierre swallowed the pill, and, kissing the hand that smote him, he signified his renunciation, and handsomely, too, like the true courtier he was.

"Sire, I have ever desired to give Your Majesty a signal proof of my affection. Of a surety it were impossible to find a loftier one than this. To forgo so illustrious an alliance, to renounce so perfect a lady and one whom I love so madly. . . . But there! I give her up for good, since it pleases Your Majesty to have it so. All I hope is that this new love will bring you as much bliss as the loss of it would bring pain to me, if my regard for Your Majesty did not prevent me from feeling it. . . ."

Henry laid his cheek against his friend's, embraced him, and weeping with emotion, promised him all sorts of wonderful things in the future.

That night, Bassompierre, already a little lighter at heart, came back again to the Louvre. Perhaps, after all, it was only a passing infatuation on the King's part. He played dice by the bedside with his master. The room was swarming with people. All of a sudden the King said he wanted to see the little princess. He couldn't go two hours on end without setting eyes on that piece of auroral loveliness.

There was a flurry of silk. 'Twas she! He told her, with a smile, about Bassompierre's prompt renunciation.

"I want to give you to my nephew. In that way you will be a princess of the blood, and always near me."

Condé. A fop. His pages and his old coachmen could testify that he was no man for the ladies! Besides, he was a mean-spirited, miserly fellow. He cheated at cards, and was always a sloven.

The young girl adored the irresistible Bassompierre. She gave a haughty glance at the deserter and shrugged her shoulders.

The ex-swain turned and fled, stricken with shame and remorse.

The marriage of the Prince of Condé, aged twenty years and six months, to Charlotte de Montmorency, fourteen years and ten months, was solemnised at the Château de Chantilly.

At the end of May, the young couple received orders to go to Fontainebleau to visit the King, who had had a detailed account given him about everything connected with the wedding. Thus

he was overjoyed to hear that the marriage had not been consummated.

Flattered by the attention paid her by the King, who overwhelmed her with presents and poems, the child began flirting with the elderly faun and dubbed him her "Knight." She had her portrait painted for him, and Bassompierre was the bearer of it.

In the pearly softness of a lovely night in June, steeped in the heady perfumes of the woods that girt the castle, the royal lover wandered to and fro. She saw his masked form moving shadow-like among the trees. He was encumbered with a guitar. He had implored her to show herself at her window with unbraided hair, between two torches. And she had agreed to do so. Ah, what a priceless boon! Overflowing with emotion, the King, kneeling on the grass, was blowing kisses to her and looking so grotesque that the girl went back and shut the window, exclaiming, "Jesus, he's mad!" But more persons than one were looking on at that scene in the park. There was Condé, who was anything but a complaisant husband; and Marie de' Medici, in a towering rage, saying that the whole Court was nothing but a lot of pimps and panders; and Henriette d'Entragues, the picture of frustrated ambition.

Condé took his wife away with him to his country estate, after a violent scene with the King. In July, César de Vendôme was married to Mlle de Mercœur. The first prince of the blood was bound to put in an appearance at the celebrations. He kicked against it for a long time, but at last he arrived.

The King, looking more of a dandy than ever, "outshone the other lords, as the sun outshines the stars, and, blazing with pearls and priceless gems, in sumptuous attire, all accoutred for the lists of love, tilted at the ring and carried it off almost every time."

Condé's mother, in order to curry favour with Henry IV, gave him all the help she could. Condé took his wife away and withdrew with her to somewhere in the neighbourhood of Soissons. He was passionately fond of the chase, and went stag-hunting through the length and breadth of Picardy. Charlotte paid visits to her neighbours.

One day, just as she was on the point of stepping into her coach, she noticed a falconer holding a bird on his wrist. The man, who had a bandage over his eye, cantered up to the door of the coach. All of a sudden she recognised the King! With a shriek she flung herself to the other side of the carriage.

Some little time later a man was standing in the doorway of a hunting-lodge quite motionless, with one hand on his heart.

"Ah, God, the King's in there!" cried the princess, flushing crimson with emotion.

Henry was present, though she never knew it, at his innamorata's dinner. He hid behind some tapestry. That cheered him up, and he went back to Fontainebleau.

But he couldn't bear to be away from his innocent young thing, who, with her kittenish ways, meaning no harm, went on playing her fatal role.

"My nephew, you've spent enough time in the country. Come, before the bad weather brings you home perforce. Thus I shall have something to thank you for."

Condé returned alone. His blood was up and he was ready to speak his mind to anyone. He did not believe in this "platonic" love of the King for his wife. All the hatred of the Condés for the Bourbons, of a youngster for his elder, came out in this little dyspeptic, who was not even the son of his father.

He decided to get out of France. Without a word of warning to his wife, he woke her one morning at four, and made her get into a carriage which, driven by a gamekeeper, took the road to Flanders.

The roads were in a terrible state of mud and slush owing to the November rains, and by the time night came on they had made but little progress. If they didn't do better than that, thought Condé, someone would catch them up. So he hoisted Charlotte on to a hack, and at three in the morning they both pulled up just over the frontier, quite worn out and soaked to the skin. They

flung themselves down on some straw to snatch a few moments' slumber. At daybreak they took horse again, and by eight had reached Landrecies, a fortified town in the Low Countries.

While the gamekeeper's son was galloping away as hard as he could towards Paris to denounce them, on the evening of the day on which the Prince had "abducted" his wife, a Gentleman-in-Waiting brought the unwelcome tidings to the King.

Henry laid down his cards and went as white as a sheet.

"Bassompierre," he groaned, putting his hand to his forehead, "I'm done for. . . ."

He burst like a madman into the Queen's bedroom. She had been delivered four days before of a daughter, Henriette, the future Queen of England. He walked across the room, banging at the wall, talking to himself before all the courtiers, who had got up and followed him in mute amazement.

"Summon the Council. Tell my friend I want him."

The Captain of the Guard hurried away to the Arsenal. Sully demurred at coming out in the middle of the night. However, when he learnt the reason of this belated visitation, he got up and, preceded by torches, made his way to the Louvre.

Henry was still in bed with his wife, who had turned a harassed and woebegone countenance to the wall. The poor old Evergreen had aged more in two hours than in ten whole years of fighting. The friends were standing motionless, glued to the wall, like statues.

"Look here!" exclaimed the King, rushing up to the Superintendent and seizing his hand; "our man has gone, and taken everything with him! What have you to say about it?"

"I say, Sire, that there's nothing new or strange in that," answered Sully, quite calmly.

"Come now, what's to be done? Tell me what *you* think first. I haven't asked anyone else so far."

"I beg you to let me sleep on it, and to-morrow I'll come and give you some sound advice; whereas if you press me now, I shouldn't say anything to the purpose. My brain doesn't work quick enough for that."

"No, no! I want you to tell me now! What had I better do?"

"Nothing," said Sully, irritably.

"What do you mean, nothing? That's no advice."

"Pardon me, Sire, it is excellent advice, and you would do well to take it. Some illnesses need rest rather than physic, and I hold this to be one of them."

"Oh, keep your philosophy till it's asked for," retorted the King.

Condé's old master was shedding tears. President Jeannin suggested threatening the Governor of the Low Countries with immediate war if he didn't send back the fugitives. Henry adopted that plan.

An envoy of the guards and an officer of the watch hurried off in pursuit of the abductor. In the King's name they demanded of the governors and magistrates that Condé should be apprehended. The governors of fortified towns in the north and north-east received orders to assist in the arrest. Before the day was out, the whole frontier was seething with excitement.

The Archdukes had already given the Prince leave to pass through the Low Countries and were providing him with an escort. Henry, now in a desperate state of mind, wrote to the Ambassadors instructing them to inform the King of Spain, the Suzerain of the Low Countries, that he (Henry) would use every means with which God might inspire him to avenge himself on each and all who should give hospitality to Condé.

Condé, in his own defence, explained his position to the Pope, the Emperor of Germany and the King of Spain. It was unanimously agreed that the Prince had been perfectly right to leave the country. Nevertheless, when the young princess appeared, it was realised that Henry had some excuse for his passion.

Henry threatened to go and bring back his nephew with an army of fifty thousand foot and ten thousand horse.

"It's not so easy to put fifty thousand men in the field as it is to go stag-hunting," the Archdukes replied.

The King then sent the Marquis de Cœuvres, to endeavour to

compel the Prince to consent to a divorce. This man, who was thoroughly unscrupulous, was a brother of Gabrielle d'Estrées and a friend of Condé's.

The scandalous adventure was the talk of Europe.

But the King, who was sick and greatly aged, was so affected that even his confessor conjured the Ambassador of the Low Countries to exercise forbearance.

"The body is the plague of the soul," as Amyot, the tutor of Charles IX and Henry III, had once remarked.

Tired of waiting for the result of the negotiations, Henry IV, who scarcely spent a day without weeping, instructed his agents to kidnap the Princess. But to carry off a Princess of the Blood, who was receiving the hospitality of the Archdukes, would have been a proceeding fraught with the gravest consequences; and although Charlotte, fascinated by the idea of eventually becoming Queen of France, agreed to be carried off, she was so carefully guarded that the scheme fell through.

And now, alarmed at this outbreak of senile eroticism in her husband, and fearful of being repudiated, the Queen demanded her coronation. Cotton, the Papal agent, who had brought about an estrangement between the King and Sully, took the matter up. Henry IV promised that the project should be carried out.

In April, the Marquis de Cœuvres came back, bringing home his cavaliers and the company of light horse sent to take part in the abduction. With diminished head he stood in the presence of the King, who had changed out of all knowledge.

"My troubles have pulled me down so much, I'm only skin and bone. Everything gets on my nerves. I avoid company, and if, to carry out some social obligation, I suffer myself to be dragged off to some function or other, instead of being a pleasure, the thing is nearly the death of me."

Thus he wrote to the Abbé de Préaux, whose mission it was to pass on his love-letters to the Princess.

"The King of France," said the Spanish Ambassador to his sovereign, "would barter the Dauphin and all his other sons for the Princess de Condé, and that leads me to think he will risk anything for his love-affairs. His health has suffered a great deal; he cannot sleep and sometimes gives people the impression that his mind is giving way. Once so fond of society, he will now spend two or three hours on end walking up and down in gloomy solitude. They say that he will sometimes stay awake at night talking to himself and repeating the Princess's name over and over again."

The rattle of arms was heard all over Europe, and the tension was general. Germany claimed the right to annex the duchies of Cleves and Juliers. At the request of the Duke's natural heirs, Henry declared himself against the proposal, only too happy to have a pretext for crossing the frontier. Along every road in France men under arms, clad in iron or leather, on foot or on horseback, were converging on the point of concentration on the eastern frontiers. Drums were beating unceasingly. Sully's hundred cannon rolled along the streets of Paris, dried now by the springtide sun—Paris filled with stupefaction at this lover's madness—and advanced as far as Châlons-sur-Marne.

Spain was uneasy, and asked the reason for all these military preparations. The King answered fiercely that Spain had always been against him, had corrupted all his friends and all his mistresses, and now was harbouring his nephew.

"If Philip III compels me to mount my horse," he cried, "I will go and hear Mass in Milan, break my fast in Rome, and dine in Naples."

Six thousand Swiss arrived, heavy, truculent-looking fellows. A number of Savoyards were added to the forces. The Marches of Picardy were bristling with soldiery. Seething with impatience, the King tried on his coat-of-arms, which was of velvet adorned with little fleurs-de-lys in gold embroidery.

Since she had fallen out with the King, Henriette, of whom no one was now in awe, had been taking Vitellius for her model. Continual indulgence in the pleasures of the table had made her

enormously fat; nevertheless she saw clearly enough the abyss towards which Henry was hastening. The circle of his foes was gathering ever more closely about him. He was becoming too bold, frustrating too many ambitions. If he returned victorious, if he took not only his "fair angel," but the Low Countries and the Rhineland Provinces as well, the power of Spain would be seriously diminished.

The one-time heretic King was the terror of the whole Catholic world. As his death was longed for, superstition took a hand in the game. In this year of grace, 1610, the Wandering Jew appeared in all manner of different places, at Beauvais, Noyon and several towns in Picardy. It was the presage that a royal death was imminent. Certain people, learned in theology, announced that the King would die in 1610. He was warned by the astrologers to take particular heed to himself between the 13th and 14th of the month.

The Marquise saw clearly, and saw far. She had seen quarrel upon quarrel, feud upon feud between Marie and her spouse, and knew it would end in irreparable estrangement. She gauged the impatience of all the tribe of courtiers who, with Marie as regent, saw themselves masters of France. In her bosom, hatred planted its poisoned darts. She had never forgiven the King his broken covenant. The Bishopric of Metz, which he was asking the Pope to confer upon their son, seemed in her eyes a mockery. If the King died, Gaston-Henry, now a boy of eight, might be acknowledged Dauphin. Why not? For that a deal of money would be needed, and a place of refuge to which she could retire during the troubles that were bound to supervene when the King was no more. She called upon the King of Spain to make good his word.

Philip III vouchsafed no answer save to his Ambassador in France.

"The moment," said he, "does not seem opportune for giving the Marquise de Verneuil anything more than fair words."

RAVAILLAC

THE Queen was crowned at Saint Denis on the 13th May 1610, amid circumstances of great pomp. On this occasion, the King belied his reputation for meanness. Gold was flung unstintingly to the crowd.

On the following day, the 14th, Marie was to make her state entry into her beloved capital, and the King was due to start two days later to put himself at the head of his troops.

"I will sleep at Saint Denis on the Wednesday; I shall be back again Thursday; see to business Friday. Saturday, I shall do some stag-hunting; Sunday, my wife will make her state entry; Monday is my daughter de Vendôme's wedding day; Tuesday, the banquet; Wednesday, to horse again."

After the ceremony at Saint Denis, Henry IV, looking very pale, took his little eight-and-a-half-year-old Dauphin and lifted him high above the crowd, saying:

"Gentlemen, behold your King!" For something, some sinister presentiment, told him he would not come back from this expedition.

Long before his day, Louis XI had been wont to remark that the Kings of France did not live beyond sixty; Henry IV was fifty-seven.

Well, what matter! He would not be sorry to take his leave. He had played the King of France long enough, mewed up in sloth and softness. It would rejuvenate, cleanse him, to play the King of Navarre once more!

On the evening of the 13th he came back to Paris. He opened his eyes wide at the triumphal arches that had been put up for Marie, the casks of wine all ready to be broached at the street-corners, and the taverns filled to overflowing with their joyous crowds. The

prisons had set free their prisoners. Everywhere was joy and merrymaking. Nevertheless, it was whispered, within the shadow of the churches, that the King was going away to make war on the Pope.

On the 14th, Henry woke up with a heavy head and a bitter taste in his mouth. Bad dreams still clung to him, even when he was awake. The soothsayers had enjoined him not to go out that day, but to remain, strongly guarded, in his palace.

Vendôme came in, pale despite his paint and powder.

"I beseech you remember what the doctor at Soissons said. He told you to beware an attack on the fourteenth."

The King smiled.

"He's a madman, and you're another," he replied.

He looked long and sorrowfully at the lanky, scented youth, who, though he had been married for months now, has as yet not consummated the marriage.

"Monsieur," he added, "I'll take you to la Paulet some day soon. She'll enlighten you, perhaps."

His son left the room. The King spent a long time in prayer, and then flung himself on his bed. But he could not sleep. A feverishness possessed him. At length he got up again, went to the window and looked out upon the green gardens of the Pré-aux-Clercs. A strange sight met his eyes. It was Margot seated in a swing, which was being vigorously kept in motion by a tall footman. To and fro through the air she flew. The King shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of irritation.

Later on he received a few people in audience. Some act of turpitude he heard of sent him off into a towering rage. If he came back, he said, he would take care that henceforth gold was not more powerful in his kingdom than character and good deeds. Then he went to Mass and came back through the Tuileries, with Bassompierre and the Duke of Guise. He made a few witty jests in his old Gascon fashion, then a sudden fit of melancholy descended on him.

"You don't know me now, you people," he said, "but one of



THE ASSASSINATION OF HENRY IV

these days I shall die, and you will see then the difference there is between me and other men."

He had been warned, over and over again, that he would die between the 13th and the 14th May. But he was used to predictions of that nature. Ever since he had arrived at the age of reason, they had been dinned into his ears. At first, he had discredited them, but latterly the mystery that enshrouds the life and death of mortal man had weighed upon his mind.

"Bah!" he said, "we must resign ourselves to the will of God. What He has ordained will come to pass, whether we will or no."

Then he burst out laughing, and slapped his thigh, saying, "A man should go forth gaily to his fate, and not let himself be dragged along unwillingly."

He knew how to meet death. He knew he could not live for ever. And life, life without Charlotte, what was the good of it?

He donned a coat of black satin and proceeded to his wife's apartment. Upstairs, in her room above the Queen's, Leonora, with her Jewish sorcerers around her, was anxiously scrutinising the death throes of a white cock that had been slit open at the breast. Portions of liver that had been prodded and cut into by scalpels were lying on a slab.

"He's dead," muttered a little wax-like humpback.

An evil glint lit up the dwarf-girl's eyes. The King was heard to say that he was going to see Sully, with whom he was far from pleased. Oh, he had had proofs. Sully had been taking bribes—and big ones. Alas, whom could you trust?

"Go not," cried the Queen, wringing her hands. "Go not abroad to-day."

He looked her up and down with a smile. She had dreamed, the previous winter, that he had been stabbed with a dagger, and how she had wept then, for all her peevishness; how her soft, unwieldy frame had been convulsed with tears! Did she love him, by any chance? he wondered.

"Madame la Régente," said he, with a lordly bow, "the King has no such misgivings."

"At least put on a coat of mail."

"You are mad, every one of you."

Nevertheless he began to pace the room with an anxious look on his brow.

"My sweet, shall I go? Or shall I not?" he inquired, as if his fate rested with her.

"You cannot go out to-day. Stay where you are. You can talk to M. de Sully to-morrow."

He played a little with his children, cracked joke after joke with the women, but still he felt a sinking at the heart, felt as if a fever was gnawing at his vitals.

His Captain of the Guard came to tell him that it would not be prudent for him to venture out, unless most carefully guarded, on a day when so many foreigners and strange people, to say nothing of the released prisoners, were wandering at large throughout the city.

It was being constantly repeated that a hired assassin sent by Spain was looking out for a propitious moment to take the King's life. A woman who had received the confession of one Ravallac, a man obsessed with the idea of killing the King, had just been cast into prison, a sure means of hushing things up. This Ravallac was in the pay of the Duke of Épernon, the vainglorious conspirator who had once been one of Henry III's mignons, a born traitor, and hand in glove with the Queen and Henriette.

The King made a gesture of impatience.

"Go to," he said, "you would cozen me. Fifty years and more I've saved my skin without a Captain of the Guard; and so I will continue to do. You can stay here with the women."

As the Captain continued to press his case, the King turned rudely upon him.

"Begone!" he cried in an angry voice; "I'll have no one. Go about your business."

He got into his coach, which rather resembled a char-à-bancs, with a few lords, and without an escort. He took next to him the smooth-tongued Duke of Épernon, who for forty years had been his nearest, dearest foe.

As he put his foot on the step, he asked what day of the month it was, so as to be quite sure he was not making a mistake.

"The fifteenth," said someone, who was in the secret of the dark presage.

"No, the fourteenth," said another, with greater accuracy but less tact.

"Yes, 'tis even so," said the King, with a sigh.

He laughed a little, and then, with a far-off look in his eyes, he murmured wistfully, "Between the thirteenth and the fourteenth."

The coach set off at a round pace. A man, a red-haired, red-bearded man, of somewhat unsteady gait, with the glare of a drink-maddened fanatic in his eye, Ravailac—for it was he—even as he went, ran his fingers along the edge of a kitchen knife which he had just been sharpening on a kerb-stone. And as he went his lips moved silently in prayer. With his right hand he fingered a talisman, reputed to be a portion of the True Cross, which had been given him by a priest of Angoulême and which absolved from every sin.

Moreover, it would be a killing pleasing in the sight of God, and no sin, inasmuch as the King, who was in league with the Protestants, was going forth to wage war upon the Pope and cast him from his seat. Did not Mariana, the Jesuit, affirm in a book that it was lawful, yea laudable, to slay any ruler who aimed at the destruction of religion, morality and laws?

In the Rue de la Ferronnerie, hard by the Cemetery of the Innocents, the royal conveyance was forced to halt owing to a block caused by a collision between two wagons, the one loaded with wine, the other with hay.

From the open door of a tavern came the noise of singing and laughter. The King, casting an eye in that direction, noticed the sign. It ran:

The Crown and the Pierced Heart.

Here the Duke of Épernon handed him a petition. At that moment, the assassin, jumping up on to the axle of a wheel, raised his knife.

The King, who had escaped so many perils, so often evaded the assassin's stroke, had seemed to bear a charmed life.

The first blow rent his doublet and his shirt. Putting up his hand to defend himself, the King exposed his breast, and the murderer's second blow severed his aorta. Ravailac was brandishing his knife for a further stroke when he was seized by a serving-man.

The King had ceased to breathe. The knife had reached his heart, his one vulnerable spot.

The wildest uproar ensued. A cloak was thrown over the body, and the coach returned to the Louvre, rattling over the cobbles which poor Vert-Galant was reddening with his blood. They tried to bring him round with wine. The Chief Physician, aghast that his master should die without the sacraments, cried agonisingly in his ear:

"Sire, remember your God. Say in your heart: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me.'"

But the King was past hearing. They held a crucifix to his lips.

Behind the palace doors were heard the groans of the Queen.

The people of Paris, suddenly awakening to a sense of their loss, gathered in crowds beneath the walls of the Louvre, weeping, wailing, flinging themselves on their knees. From the mighty throng rose up a confused murmur of prayers and sobbing, enveloping the dead man who in his lifetime had hungered so desperately for love.

"Never more, methinks, will the people of Paris weep as they wept that day," said Malherbe.

Too late! Too late! Too late!

All the shops were shut. Suddenly it dawned on the people of France that they had lost a father.

There were some who thought strange things, remembering that this cruel and senseless murder was enacted the very next day after the "fat goodwife" had been crowned and proclaimed Regent.

Consternation spread throughout the provinces. Soldiers and

captains were stricken with grief. All Europe bewailed the passing of the great King.

Amid all this sorrow and desolation, d'Aubigné, that dauntless comrade-in-arms, wrote this epitaph for his King:

“Guerrier sans peur, vainqueur sans fiel, roi sans mignons.”

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